THE COALESCENCE OF *CLOUD ATLAS*

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ABSTRACT

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Cloud Atlas, David Mitchell's 2004 book, is the subject of the following study of the invented notion of *coalescence*. Just as the six disjunctive yet intertwined stories of *Cloud Atlas* "coalesce" to form a cohesive novel, so does the work of multiple artists "coalesce" to form David Mitchell's idiomatic artistry—what might be called his creative soul. In his manipulation of style, character, and genre, David Mitchell has clearly and outspokenly coalesced influential works of literature into his own literature. Less clear is how David Mitchell has also coalesced influential works of *music* into both his literature and his (fictional) music, the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. This thesis seeks to elucidate this intra- and inter-artform coalescence—literature to literature, music to literature, music to music, and literature to music—and thereby celebrate the essential and transcendent bond between the inspirer and the inspired, the coalescer and the coalesced, the lover and the loved.

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To all of the music teachers, composers, and performers I've coalesced (I'm saying goodbye)—

To Drs. Brian Doherty and Elliott Antokoletz, who went above and beyond in their roles—

And most of all, to my parents, who have given me everything—

Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNING AND THE END[1]

The Art of Fiction

On August 22, 2004, an interviewer for the *Washington Post* asked David Mitchell a simple question:

What was the inspiration for Cloud Atlas*?*

Mitchell, a young British author who had published *Cloud Atlas*, his second novel, earlier that year, understood that the answer was not so straightforward.

"There wasn't really a single Eureka moment," he explained, "For me, novels coalesce into being, rather than arrive fully formed" ("Fantastic Voyage").

Coalesce into being was one of those sticky phrases that, days after I read the interview, kept unexpectedly glomming itself onto my thoughts and speech—a certain swelling musical phrase seemed to *coalesce into being*, the din of students in classrooms seemed to *coalesce into being*, cool spring dawns seemed to *coalesce into being*. And of course, floating high above me every day, wide Texas clouds literally *coalesced into being*.

"Coalescence" is the scientific term for the phase in the water cycle sandwiched between evaporation and precipitation, in which droplets collect and combine into those atmospheric formations that have so entranced dreamers everywhere. In using the word, Mitchell was cleverly playing on the title (and central metaphor) of his book—"Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies," says one of Mitchell's six protagonists, "an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same, it's still a cloud an' so is a soul. Who can say where the cloud's blowed

[1] Pianists may notice that the chapters of this thesis are named after the sequences of the classical sonata form: introduction, exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda. I hope the reader will indulge this attempt at craftiness; it (and this thesis in general) stems mainly from a nostalgia for the days I counted myself a musician.

from or who the soul'll be 'morrow? …only the *atlas o' clouds*" (emphasis added, *CA* 308).[2] But in this *Washington Post* interview, Mitchell wasn't talking about the content of his novel—he was talking about the *creation* of his novel, the act of writing. Here, a "cloud" didn't symbolize a soul, it symbolized his book, a work of art.

So how did *Cloud Atlas* the novel, not *Cloud Atlas* the story, *coalesce into being*? The first hint of an answer, the first germination of this thesis, came to me in the summer of 2016, on the forty-first floor of an office building in Midtown Manhattan.

It was lunchtime at my summer internship, and I was reading David Mitchell's *Paris Review* "The Art of Fiction" interview. I worked (and will work) at the biggest investment bank in the world—considering the nature of this thesis, I assume this might surprise you. The irony was not lost on me as I scrolled through the lengthy article over my salad (in a display of piety, all of the interns ate exclusively in front of their computers) dressed in business-casual, an Excel model running in the background.

Considering that most of my colleagues have pure business-school educations, they probably wouldn't have understood my absorption had they glanced over at my screen; they wouldn't have known that "The Art of Fiction" series revolutionized the world of literary criticism over half a century ago and remains an icon of authorial glory.[3] To be featured in "The Art of Fiction" is to be memorialized alongside the likes of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Kurt Vonnegut, Stephen King, Jonathan Franzen, and (as of the time of writing) 227 other authors who can similarly be recognized by last name alone, the caliber of literary fame

[2] A full synopsis of *Cloud Atlas* will follow this section.

[3] That observation isn't meant to further widen the nefarious intellectual chasm between the arts/humanities and the "earthier" vocational schools, a chasm that I've struggled to bridge in my four years as a dual major; to me, my colleagues' versed familiarity with the *Wall Street Journal* or *Bloomberg* (and I realize this may sound defensive) is just as admirable.

that colors the dreams of aspiring writers everywhere. Although I had by that summer read three of his novels, and noticed how prominently his work was featured in British bookshops, I was still amazed that David Mitchell (No. 204 in the series), just forty-one years old at the time of interview, had already transformed into simply "Mitchell." Like Madonna, I thought admiringly, or Adele.

And like Adele, who attended the prestigious BRIT performing arts school and whose debut album *19* was certified seven times platinum, Mitchell clearly has the chops to back up his literary ability.[4] Throughout his "Art of Fiction" interview, Mitchell scatters references to close to forty writers by whom he's been inspired, admired, or simply read, a generous handful of which have preceded him in *The Paris Review*; in between, he mentions that he himself writes up to seven hours a day. Suddenly, his conversational and literary "lexical ingenuity," as his interviewer Adam Begley puts it, is no longer a mystery—Mitchell has clearly spent his entire life steeping in the fountain of the English language. To squeeze him like a teabag is to squeeze out the words of many of the greatest writers in history, flavored, of course, by Mitchell's own experiences, personality, and context; in short, by his soul.

Now, I realize that "soul" is a loaded word. But the concept of a soul—specifically, recycled souls—lies at the heart of *Cloud Atlas*, and is thus unavoidable in any discussion thereof. In a previous incarnation of this chapter, I spent some twenty pages attempting to parse out a definition, spending hours surrounded by stacks of the existing scholarly literature on Mitchell—essays with titles like "Discursive Identity Through Narrative Form" and "Utopia,

[4] His own debut, the novel *Ghostwritten*, was also critically acclaimed, winning the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1999.

Transmigration and Time" and "'Around We Go': Transpositional Life Cycles."[5] In the days after polishing it off and digesting it and trying to put it aside, I developed a faint sort of mind-nausea[6] that became more and more unbearable as I began to realize—I had gone about it all the wrong way. *Cloud Atlas* wasn't really about what the soul is *in itself* (Mitchell never really bothers to give a strict description, nor does he need to), but rather the *connections between souls*. In *Cloud Atlas*, the mechanism of this connection is a form of reincarnation. In our world, I argue that one such mechanism is *the collective influence of artistic predecessors*—what I will, in acknowledgment of Mitchell's *Washington Post* interview, call *coalescence*.

To clarify, let us take an example. Reinhold Heil is a musician-composer who co-created the score of the film *Cloud Atlas*, famed for its staggering budget and its double Wachowski directorship (of *Matrix* fame), but primarily for its massive box office flop. In early March 2017, I had the opportunity to connect with Heil over Skype. Wearing fashionable rimmed spectacles and backlit by Californian sunlight, Heil fairly brimmed over with enthusiasm when questioned about his work, often spinning off on tangents accented by hints of his native German and by elegant sweeps of the arm perfected, no doubt, by his training in classical piano.[7] On one such tangent, he explained the challenge that "temp music" universally poses for score composers. Because the score is usually only completed and added in the post-production phase, directors play temp music on set to get a full atmospheric feel for the scene, usually well-known standard stuff—a John Williams orchestral riff, for example. The problem is, the temp music, played over and over again as it is, ends up subconsciously infiltrating the scene—the action is paced to it,

[5] I am only gently poking fun at these titles, and hope to avoid offending scholars like Sarah Dillon who wrote, in the introduction of *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, an injured rebuttal to similar mocking in the *Los Angeles Times*. Ms. Dillon, I found your collection valuable and your enthusiasm infectious.
[6] As a senior in her last semester of undergrad, the prospect of rewriting twenty pages was quite literally sickening.
[7] Please see Chapter 5b for an edited transcript of the interview with Mr. Reinhold Heil.

the emotion is charged by it, the cinematography is matched to it. In the end, the composers are left with two options: find a way to hastily license the no-longer-temp music, or write a soundtrack that parallels the temp music close enough to match the beat of the film but far enough to just barely avoid copyright infringement, a process Heil somewhat ruefully calls "blueprint composing." Either way, the creative capacities of the composer are slashed.

"Blueprint composing" is an extreme example of a single line of coalescence (what might better be known as appropriation), in that it is *directly* inspired by a preceding composer's work and "precipitates" a new work that is almost uncomfortably similar. But the phenomenon of coalescence occurs even when one is working *without* an explicit blueprint, as Heil did with the *Cloud Atlas* film. When Heil co-wrote the original score, he was coalescing a lifetime's worth of musical encounters: the piano melodies he began learning at age ten, the organ motets he played for church services in his adolescence, the classical curriculum he studied at the Berlin Music Academy, the jazz albums he loved, the electronica that thrummed like a heartbeat in Berlin before the Fall. Work from composers ranging from Bach to Miles Davis to John Williams; work that has taught him, inspired him, and, at times, reappeared like ghosts in his own work.

That sort of uncanniness used to bother him, said Heil. When he was just starting out in film composing, he used to discard entire works because they sounded too much like John Williams or Hans Zimmer or Ennio Morricone; i.e., when the result of coalescence was too obvious. This self-doubt ended in an epiphany in an unlikely place[8]: despairing in the hellish snarl of Los Angeles traffic, Heil was soothing his nerves with a personal favorite piece of music—Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*—when his teenaged son suddenly exclaimed, "Hey, Dad! That's *Star Wars*!" *It kind of is*, Heil realized, and the angels sang. John Williams had done with

[8] Epiphanies seem to naturally make their homes in such unlikely places. The "Eureka!" story of Archimedes comes to mind.

Stravinsky what Heil thought *he* had done with Williams—borrowed. Reimagined. Sometimes, straight up copied. And Williams hadn't limited himself to just Stravinsky—in creating the musical universe of *Star Wars*, one of the best-known soundtracks of all time, he had coalesced the works of Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Holst, Elgar, and undoubtedly many others (Gabler). And if John does it, thought Heil, why shouldn't I?

Indeed, is it even possible to create art without coalescence? No art has ever been birthed from a void—every musician, even if they were not directly trained by other musicians, has felt their heart sing to someone else's composition; every painter has felt utterly moved by someone else's painting; every writer has lost their entire selves in the pages of someone else's book. They have, in some way, breached another artist's inner world, and, when departing, they have taken something with them. Heil took from Williams took from Stravinsky took from Rimsky-Korsakov took from Balakirev took from Glinka took from Basili and so on and on, a continuous chain stretching back ages, shackling together the rise and fall of empires, artistic eras, *continents* even, through the music borne of individuals. Each one kept alive in the work of the next.

The degree to which a work of art is due to its coalescence is debatable, and necessitates a momentary veering off into the philosophical territory of determinism versus free will. Did Heil pick this particular chord, rhythm, instrumentation *solely* because of the specific combination of music and musicians he has encountered in his life? Or is there something there that's beyond the sum of his past, that originates not from the chain, but from something that exists only within him? Perhaps the most succinct answer to this question comes from the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who in his essay *On the Freedom of the Will* wrote, "We can

do what we wish, but we can only wish what we must" (Viereck 114).[9] Artistic creativity is formed *only* by the uncontrollable forces of who we are and what we know (we "wish what we must"), but the way we shape, combine, deconstruct, manipulate, reimagine all of the infinitesimal elements of "who we are and what we know"—in short, how we coalesce—is what allows art to call itself original (to "do what we wish"). To call art truly "revolutionary" (entirely free-willed), then, is "sheer nonsense," as the musician Béla Bartók argued (4). But clearly, neither is art stagnant and unprogressive (entirely deterministic). As a compromise, Bartók suggested that we need only drop the *r* and call it "evolution":

> In the succession…there is no abrupt turning away from previous devices and no abolition of almost all the means used by preceding composers [revolution]. What we will see is a gradual change, leading from patterns and means of their predecessors, to a style and means of expression of their own [evolution]. (notes in brackets added, 6)

In other words, evolution—not revolution—is the product of coalescence. Mitchell himself seems to think much the same, "wonder[ing] if this thing we call originality isn't an electric motor powered by the two poles of the already done and the new twist, or the familiar and the far-out" ("Art of Fiction"). The "already done" flows down from the coalescent chain. The "new twist" comes from you, and only you, and that little bit adds a drop to the flow.

That, I think, is the closest we get to rebirth in our world. We get to live on in the work of those we have influenced, and then in the work *they* influence, never completely resurrected, but there all the same.

[9] This elegant translation from the original German was made by none other than Albert Einstein. Einstein was an artist himself, and stated that "If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music" (Viereck 113).

A (Not So) Brief Explanation of *Cloud Atlas*

Cloud Atlas is difficult to explain. My numerous floundering attempts at describing it has probably done its sales a disservice. To save you from my latest, I zealously encourage you to read the book itself (and if you have, this next section is hardly necessary), but in the meantime, the following is, if you will, an atlas for the *Atlas*.

Page one. The first title page reads "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing." It's the diary of a traveling man, written, as we immediately see from the archaic language and notations, a long time ago. The colonial era. A reader less versed in world history and/or the work of Herman Melville will guess the date as sometime in the 1800s (the fictional Ewing heads his entries with just the month and day). Ewing is an American notary wading through Oceania on his way back to California. His ship the *Prophetess* is temporarily docked in Chatham Isles, a landmass off the coast of New Zealand populated by a mix of British colonizers and natives, the warring Maori and enslaved Moriori tribes. Repulsed by the boorishness of the seamen, Ewing befriends a fellow traveler, Dr. Henry Goose, from whom he seeks treatment for an unspecified ailment. When the two of them set sail together on the *Prophetess*, Ewing is horrified to find stowed away in his cabin a Moriori slave named Autua, who begs him to save his life. Ewing, unloved by the sailors as it is, finds this prospect alarming, but nevertheless manages to secure Autua safe passage.

By the 39th page of this seafaring story, the reader has become accustomed to the journal format and the dated language and is beginning to sink into comfortable immersion when the book suddenly cuts off mid-sentence. Confused, the reader flips back and forth from 39 to 40, which is blank. Wets their finger and rubs at the paper in case the pages are stuck. Stares bemusedly at the "Letters from Zedelghem" title on 41 and the following words on 43, which is

clearly not the same story. Adam Ewing's journal might as well have been literally snatched from the reader's hands.

Apparently, enough readers have been confounded by this cliffhanger (which is not really a cliffhanger as much as being thrown off a cliff that you didn't know was there) that Amazon has been forced to publish a disclaimer: "***Product Alert:*** *This book does not contain a misprint on page 39. It is the way the author has written the book. He returns to the seemingly abandoned storyline later.*" In fact, the structure is an *integral* part of "the way the author has written the book," and it's unfortunate that the threat of huffy reviews has forced Amazon to spoil it. But even notwithstanding this warning, readers could have unraveled the mystery by flipping through the book and seeing that "The Pacific Journal" reappears mid-sentence on page 475. And then it dawns on the reader that the titles on the intervening pages follow a particular pattern. "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing" is followed by "Letters from Zedelghem" which is in turn followed by "Half-Lives: A Luisa Rey Mystery," "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish," "The Orison of Somni-451," "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After." By all accounts, a standard collection of short stories. Then "Orison" reappears, and "Ghastly Ordeal." "Half-Lives," "Zedelghem," "Pacific Journal." *Oh*. Cue lightbulb. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Hence, the so-called "Russian doll" structure—but that metaphor never did much for me. Instead, I like to picture the reader climbing a series of steps to a flat peak before descending the other side, down the same steps with different views. Like the architecture of a Mayan temple. A spiritual journey.

So the reader, returning to page 39, pushes on. "Letters from Zedelghem" is, well, a collection of letters from the fictional Robert Frobisher to Rufus Sixsmith, and it is the novella about which this thesis is primarily concerned. It will be summarized in detail in Chapter 3b.

"Zedelghem" at first seems like an entirely different book than "Pacific Journal"—it is set in Belgium in 1931 (Frobisher's letters are kindly dated with the year) and the change in first-person voice is deft. "Deft" is not really adequate. It is astonishing. It should come with a whiplash warning. Where Adam Ewing was transparent, virtuous, and Christian, Robert Frobisher is conniving, charming, and hedonistic. Were it not for Mitchell's trademark maximalist prose and unmistakable wit, I would have hardly believed it was the same author.

Next, "Half-Lives" is a breathy noir mystery set in 1960s California and starring will-stop-at-nothing journalist Luisa Rey. A chance meeting with a stranger on an elevator sets into motion a series of events that endangers her life and brings her the biggest investigative story of her career. The stranger in the elevator is a scientist named Rufus Sixsmith, an employee of Seaboard Corporation. Seaboard is a behemoth power company hell-bent on building a nuclear reactor on Swanneke Island in California, a reactor that Sixsmith has proved could endanger the lives of everyone in the surrounding area. Sixsmith bestows his research report to Rey and is shortly thereafter killed by Seaboard's shadowy security detail. Rey is the next slated to be silenced. The first half of "Half-Lives" ends when her car is forced off of a bridge; she seems to be plummeting to certain death.

"Ghastly Ordeal" is the modern-day autobiography of one Timothy Cavendish, a decrepit vanity publisher without a filter who is forced on the run after a disgruntled client comes for his money. Believing he is checking into a hotel, Cavendish ends up accidentally incarcerated in Aurora Home, a senior residence staffed by terrifying matrons determined to beat him (sometimes literally) into submission. This first section ends at the moment Cavendish suffers a debilitating stroke.

"Orison" is the death row interview of a fabricant named Somni-451. Somni lives in Nea So Copros, an ultra-capitalist dystopic Seoul of the far future that places a dollar value on human life while sucking the world of its resources. Somni and her fabricant sisters are clones designed to service a fast food restaurant called Papa Song's, a barely disguised McDonald's of the future. The fabricants are forced to work unflaggingly and taught to never question their position at the bottom of society; they are viewed as little better than livestock. A science experiment gone wrong causes Somni to "ascend" (gain intelligence) and thereafter she is whisked away to a university to be both educated and studied. She forms a relationship with a postgrad named Hae-Joo Im, and at the end of the first half, she learns that he is not the mild-mannered student that he seems but rather a radical revolutionary of the "Union," an organization attempting to undermine the "corpocracy" by freeing fabricants from enslavement.

The sixth and last novella is that of Zach'ry in "Sloosha's Crossin'," and, as the centerpiece of the novel, it is the only story told in whole. It is set in post-apocalyptic Hawaii, where civilization has devolved to its primitive beginnings. Zach'ry is a member of the peaceful Valleysmen tribe, whose simple life is complicated with the arrival of a woman named Meronym. Meronym is a Prescient, a member of a population that lives aboard a futuristic ship and still has access to advanced technology, what Zach'ry calls the "Smart" (both Zach'ry and Meronym speak in the childlike pidgin English exemplified in the title of this novella). Initially suspicious of Meronym, Zach'ry eventually forms a reluctant friendship with her, one that saves his life when the rival Kona tribe attacks the Valleysmen. He and Meronym escape to Prescient civilization, and, as the only remaining member of his tribe, his history is immortalized in the oral story of "Sloosha's Crossin.'"

Having crossed the top of the Mayan temple, we begin our descent. Somni is whisked away by Hae-Joo and other Union interlopers on a dizzying escape to Pusan with corpocracy's Unanimity hot on their tail. On the way, she becomes fully aware of the horrifying oppression of her fellow fabricants, and is compelled to write a book of *Declarations*, meant to serve as a call to ideals for the abolitionist movement. She is slated to be executed for this crime, and her interview concludes.

Timothy Cavendish, allied with his senior friends Ernie, Veronica, and Mr. Meeks, hatches a daring escape plan. Their hijinks almost collapse when the Aurora Home prison guards/nurses catch up to them, but they manage to get away by mustering the ultimate defenders—angry Scotsmen. Cavendish returns to life at his publishing house, content and at least somewhat less cynical.

Luisa Rey, despite several attempts on her life, ends up cracking the story of Seaboard's corruption wide open. The nuclear reactor is shut down, and her journalistic career—and more importantly, her self-belief in the value of her journalism— is saved.

Skipping over "Zedelghem"—Adam Ewing is becoming progressively sicker and sicker under the care of Henry Goose. As Ewing approaches the doorstep of death, it is revealed that Goose has been poisoning him all along in an attempt to rob Ewing of his belongings. Goose would have succeeded if not for the intervention of Autua, who rescues Ewing from Goose and the other rapacious seamen and nurses him back to health on land in Honolulu, the very same island on which Zach'ry and his Valleysmen live thousands of years later.

In each novella, it is briefly mentioned that one of the characters (usually the protagonists) have the same comet-shaped birthmark.

EXPOSITION: FROM LITERATURE TO LITERATURE

The Coalescence IN *Cloud Atlas*: Freedom and Subjection

The crux of this thesis is the conjecture that *cyclical coalescence*, as described in the previous chapter, is symbolized in *Cloud Atlas* as *literal reincarnation*; i.e., the mystical transmigration of a single soul. In the story, a character in each novella bears the same comet-shaped birthmark [in whose shape Fiona McCulloch finds symbolic meaning as "an orbital trajectory across time and space" tracing "the interconnections that exist between human, planet and universe" (149)], and multiple characters have déjà vu moments in which they apparently recall bits of past or future stories. Vyvyan Ayrs, a character in "Zedelghem," dreams of a "nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground" with "waitresses [that] all had the same face" (*CA* 79), describing the fast food restaurant where Somni-451 is employed centuries later; Rufus Sixsmith, Frobisher's past lover, comments to Luisa Rey, who he's just met, that he feels he's known her for years (*CA* 96); Somni-451 seemingly recalls Rey's car crash in "Half-Lives" when her own collision "[shakes] free an earlier memory of blackness, inertia, gravity, of being trapped in another ford" (*CA* 314); as Cavendish makes his own escape by car he "[flings] away the sensation of having lived through this moment many times before" (*CA* 380); in a California dock a hundred years later, Rey passes Adam Ewing's ship the *Prophetess* and "is distracted by a strange gravity… [Her] birthmark throbs. She grasps for the ends of this elastic moment, but they disappear into the past and the future" (*CA* 430).

Reincarnation functions as a recognizable literary trope that unites the six novellas of *Cloud Atlas*, a plausible source from which Mitchell's fascinating "echoes, eddies, and cross-references" emanate ("Art of Fiction"). These moments of déjà vu, however, would be nothing

but momentary shudders of superstition if not for the fact that each of the characters has become aware of the previous through *a work of art*. In other words, Mitchell is telling a story (on an extra-diegetic level) about stories (on a diegetic level). Significantly, Mitchell takes special care to note that each of these diegetic stories is created through the process of coalescence, metafictionally revealing a self-awareness of his own writing process; in his own words, he "rip[s] holes in the fabric of fiction" in order "to probe these very holes" ("Dreams in Fiction," 435).

Each of the six stories of *Cloud Atlas* is transformed into a specific work of art in the diegetic narrative. With "Pacific Journal," "Half-Lives," "Ghastly Ordeal," and "Sloosha's Crossin'," the work of art is the vessel through which one story is passed onto the protagonist of the next. With "Zedelghem" and "Orison," the work of art accompanies the main vessel. Adam Ewing's "Pacific Journal" was posthumously published by his son, who leaves his trace only through occasional editor's footnotes signed "J.E." (Jackson Ewing). Jackson likely took other invisible editorial liberties, liberties that do not go unnoticed by Robert Frobisher, who, picking up the book for the first time, comments, "Something shifty about the journal's authenticity—seems too structured for a genuine diary, and its language doesn't ring quite true" (*CA* 64). Frobisher reaches Luisa through the letters that make up "Zedelghem," which Rufus Sixsmith bestows to her, but also through a discovered recording of his *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. Luisa's "Half-Lives" is a manuscript of a "work of fiction" delivered to Cavendish's publishing house (*CA* 156). Cavendish's biography "Ghastly Ordeal" is a "disney" [film] that Somni-451 watches. Somni's pre-execution interview is preserved in a futuristic device called an "Orison," but her story is also captured in her own book of *Declarations*, "a Catechism to define [ascended fabricants'] ideals, to harness their anger, to channel their energies" (*CA* 346), that is transformed

into the equivalent of a Bible in the far future. Finally, Zach'ry's tale of "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After" is an oral story, polished and embellished, surely, as it is passed down from generation to generation. Each of these works of art is a vessel for a story containing within itself yet other stories: the oral story contains the *Declarations* contains the film contains the manuscript contains the *Sextet* contains the journal. This "containment" is made explicit by the interrupting structure of the book.

Zach'ry's work of art, in other words, is the product of a *coalescence* of five preceding works of art. The consumption of art in each story does not catalyze an immediate reaction (e.g. Somni is not instantaneously inspired to pen her *Declarations* when she watches Cavendish's film) but each of the six pieces of art are nevertheless centered around the same themes of *freedom against subjection*, suggesting that each might've subconsciously sparked inspiration for the next. Firstly, in "Pacific Journal," the Moriori are exploited and enslaved by both the Maori and the white colonists, and Adam Ewing, whose social standing is contrastingly guaranteed by his whiteness, is nevertheless exploited by the charlatan Dr. Henry Goose, two parallel forms of subjection through which "the savagery of the 'civilized' Western world comes into focus through its 'primitive' practices of capitalist accumulation" (Knepper 105). Ewing ultimately grants Autua his freedom by helping him escape the Chatham Isles, and Autua returns the favor by freeing Ewing from Goose's nefarious scheme. In "Zedelghem," Frobisher is estranged from his friends and family, and his compositional talent is appropriated by Ayrs (although Frobisher also has no qualms about stealing from his host). Additionally, Knepper suggests that Frobisher's condemnation of European musical society is really rage that "his talents, person, and spirit are slowly consumed through a system of patronage that is nothing short of larceny" (110). Frobisher ultimately frees himself from both Ayrs' demands and the restrictive "system of

patronage" by fleeing Zedelghem and independently composing his *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. In "Half-Lives," Luisa Rey successfully battles Seaboard Corporation's exploitation of the environment; in "Ghastly Ordeal," Timothy Cavendish manages to escape from the wardens of Aurora House, where he and his fellow senior inmates "are also subject to forms of economic parasitism as relatives seek to control their financial assets" (Knepper 111); in "Sloosha's Crossin'," Zach'ry manages to evade an attack by the warring Kona tribe, circling back to the subjugation of the Moriori by the Maori.

Most explicitly, in "Orison," Somni-451 is a "fabricant" living in the bottom layer of a violently stratified "corpocracy." Despite facing execution, Somni writes her book of *Declarations* in an effort to free her fellow fabricants from the nightmarish grip of capitalist materialism and greed. Before this, however, Somni was so "utterly, ineluctably" taken by the way Cavendish's film "enable[d] a brief resurrection" of the past that it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine its influence hidden somewhere deep in Somni's *Declarations* (*CA* 235), like Stravinsky hidden in Williams' *Star Wars*. Perhaps Cavendish's dastardly escape and unflagging wit gave her hope and optimism. Perhaps Cavendish's alliance with the other senior escapees—Ernie, Veronica, and Mr. Meeks—reminded her of the sisterly bonds between the Papa Song fabricants. Perhaps Cavendish's existence simply reminded her that an alternative to her world was possible. In whatever way, Somni's *Declarations* is the product of a *coalescence* of Cavendish's film, along with other works that Somni mined from "the length, breadth, and depth of our culture": "the twelve seminals: Jong Il's *Seven Dialects*; Prime Chairman's *Founding of Nea So Copros*; Admiral Yeng's *History of the Skirmishes*…Orwell and Huxley…Washington's *Satires on Democracy*" (*CA* 211). All of these works, whether consciously or not, educated her, influenced her, and inspired her to write. They are the stories within her story.

Notably, all of the writers of these works exist only on the diegetic level of Somni's world, except, of course, for two: George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. The two novelists are best known for *1984* and *Brave New World* respectively, both stories of misfits struggling to find their place in dystopic totalitarian societies of the future. Sound familiar?

The Literary Coalescence OF *Cloud Atlas*: A Case Study of "Letters from Zedelghem"

Reviewers of *Cloud Atlas* were quick to notice the discrete generic archetypes that influenced the style of each novella: "The plight of Somni-451 is Huxley (or "Blade Runner")," said the *New York Times* (Bissell), and *The Guardian* placed "Orison" "in the tradition of Orwell, Huxley, Alasdair Gray" (Byatt). They were, for the most part, spot on: "Each of the six sections has a model," Mitchell told the *Washington Post* ("Fantastic Voyage"), and in an essay in *The Guardian* he specified that "architectural features from pioneering SF classics such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and *The Machine Stops* by EM [*sic*] Forster…are present, with rich dollops of *Blade Runner*" ("Book Club"). Mitchell similarly pinpoints recognizable influences of the other five novellas: Melville for "Pacific Journal," Evelyn Waugh and Christopher Isherwood for "Zedelghem," "any generic airport thriller" for "Half-Lives" ("Fantastic Voyage"), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* for "Ghastly Ordeal" (Bissell and Byatt both argue that the language can be traced to Martin Amis), and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* for "Sloosha's Crossin'."

Mitchell might be said to be the authorial equivalent of a "blueprint composer," working directly off of a model so iconic of the genre that there is little hope of concealing it. Mitchell isn't unique in doing so, only in the *degree* of which he does it, and in his willingness to acknowledge it. Unlike other writers who may clamor to claim sole proprietorship of some

artistic invention, Mitchell is perfectly content to acknowledge that writing is necessarily a process of coalescence (even if he does not call it exactly that), that coalescence is not synonymous to plagiarism or ineptitude, and that maintaining a keen awareness of your own coalescence can be illuminating and productive. The scholar Martin Paul Eve also suggests that the way Mitchell teases out and exhibits individual droplets of his own coalescence usefully creates another layer of disjunction between the six temporally distanced novellas by being "emblematic of a…historiographic metafictive function in his work" (5). I would add, however, that this historiographic function is not always in lockstep with the actual chronology of the narrative—the seafaring genre that Melville epitomized was popular in the nineteenth century in which Adam Ewing lives, but the epistolary style of "Zedelghem" reached its peak well before Robert Frobisher's time, detective fiction has been perennially popular beyond the 1960s setting of "Half-Lives," and the "farce" genre of present-day "Ghastly Ordeal" is likewise not distinctive of modern literature. "Orison" and "Sloosha's Crossin'," of course, cannot be matched to their historiographical literary timelines because they are set in the future.

Mitchell so gleefully celebrates coalescence that he can't seem to resist flashing the reader cheeky little winks in the text itself. Somni reads Orwell and Huxley, while Frobisher comments that Adam Ewing reminds him of "Melville's bumbler Cpt. Delano in 'Benito Cereno,' blind to all conspirators" (*CA* 64) and a record store clerk remarks about the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, "Not exactly Delius, is it?" (*CA* 409)—the story of Frederick Delius and his amanuensis Eric Fenby is the basis of the *plot* of "Zedelghem."[10] However, the *character* and *voice* of Frobisher were derived from "Christopher Isherwood, especially in *Lions and Shadows*" ("Fantastic Voyage"). In the following sub-section, I will compare *Lions and Shadows* to

[10] Please see Chapter 3c.i for a detailed analysis.

"Zedelghem" and break apart *how* this coalescence has occurred. This comparative exercise could be repeated for Waugh, Melville, Huxley, Amis, or any of the multitude of writers cited in connection with *Cloud Atlas*; indeed, this exercise could be run on any existing piece of art, although the artist in that case may not have helpfully supplied the source as Mitchell has done. You could even run it on this very thesis (although it would be a bit self-congratulatory to call it *art*) and detect beneath my own voice the murmurs of scholars like Sarah Dillon or Martin Paul Eve, or even those of seemingly random artists: Tolkien, who I was reading over spring break between spurts of work; Sarah Bakewell, whose nonfiction book *The Existentialist Café* was still knocking around my brain when I began this chapter; and, of course, David Mitchell himself. Unlike with Mitchell's work, these were unconscious, unpracticed inspirations, and finding clumsy emulations in my writing is no great honor. Nevertheless, this indiscriminate nature of coalescence, this sort of happy randomness, engenders the hope that any artist through any piece of art—even a small-time senior thesis—can enjoy another life.

Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows*

The English-American novelist Christopher Isherwood was born in 1904 and died in 1986; he, Eric Fenby (1906-1997), and Robert Frobisher (who writes his "Letters from Zedelghem" in 1931) all grew up, then, in the same generation. Isherwood and Frobisher, both members of what might archaically be called the "landed gentry," could have worn the same smart uniform to the same preparatory school, and sat in the same classes with their chins in their hands and their eyes rolling, identically and characteristically contemptuous of some ambiguous enemy in "the system." "The system" was populated by their peers: well-groomed, well-mannered boys who could be counted on to follow a well-trodden path through England's best

public schools, on to Cambridge or Oxford, on to London's most exclusive men's clubs. This was the "Poshocracy," the antithesis of Isherwood's and Frobisher's "proudly self-sufficient, consciously declassed minority" (Isherwood 247). Of course, this "declassing" was purely in an idealistic sense; the Poshocrat image, no matter how uncomfortable, actually suited both boys well: Isherwood noted that he "was quite presentable. [He] didn't look like a midnight swotter, hadn't pimples or a grammar-school accent, didn't wear boots; further enquiries (exceedingly tactful) disclosed a minor 'county' family with the background of an Elizabethan 'place'" (Isherwood 56-57), while Frobisher, when pressed whether his "family are v. well connected in Cambridge," admitted that indeed his "family are in the Domesday Book and that Pater is an eminent churchman" (*CA* 448).

Nevertheless, the conviction of their "inverted snobbery" (Isherwood 249) was enough for both boys to disassociate—physically if not socially—from English upper class society. While studying history at Cambridge, Isherwood, along with his lifelong friend Edward Upward, "repeatedly step back to mock themselves for associating with those who…they see as fundamentally different from themselves" (Stevenson 9), before Isherwood purposely gets himself expelled by writing bogus Tripos exams. Frobisher, too, drops out of Caius, Cambridge's music college, and runs away to Belgium. For both, however, this self-imposed exile is not entirely painless. Isherwood admits that

> beneath all my note-taking, my would-be scientific detachment, my hatred, my disgust, there was the old sense of exclusion, the familiar grudging envy. For, however I might sneer, these people *were* evidently enjoying themselves in their own mysterious fashion, and why was it so mysterious to me? Weren't they of my own blood, my own caste? Why couldn't I—the would-be novelist, the professional observer—understand them? (246)

Frobisher, too, is almost too adamant in his family estrangement to be believable, insisting that "Pater's only 'concerned' because my creditors are shaking him… Mater is not 'frantic.' Only the prospect of the decanter running dry could make Mater frantic" (*CA* 52). Beneath Frobisher's and Isherwood's armored persona of artist, sending down their judgments from some imagined isolated eyrie, they share a deep insecurity of their rightful place in society.

In her M.A. thesis on *Lions and Shadows*, Katharine Stevenson argues that the origin of Isherwood's (and Frobisher's) insecurity

> lies in the fear of never being given and/or of never passing The Test of war that men of Isherwood's generation had been just too young to experience between 1914 and 1918. In Christopher's particular case, this fear is inflamed by the gendered and sexual aspects of The Test, which seems to have been formulated with traditionally masculine, heterosexual young men in mind. (23)

Failure of The Test was particularly sharp for Isherwood and Frobisher, because both boys were thrown into contrast with family members who *had* "passed" in the most valiant fashion: Isherwood's father and Frobisher's older brother Adrian were both killed in battle. Isherwood and Frobisher had to grapple with the paradox of recognizing their own luck—"We cut a pack of cards called historical context," Frobisher observes grimly, "our generation…cut tens, jacks, and queens. Adrian's cut threes, fours, and fives" (*CA* 442)—while simultaneously feeling deprived of a chance to prove themselves. Sensitive and unhappy, Isherwood and Frobisher travel, "with immense daring, with an infinitely greater expenditure of nervous energy, money, time, physical and mental resources," what Isherwood symbolizes as "the laborious, terrible north-west passage" (Isherwood 208). *Lions and Shadows* and "Zedelghem" are, metaphorically, each

travelogues of the "north-west passage," detailing Isherwood's and Frobisher's roundabout, self-imposed struggle to come to terms with their own selves.

Stevenson goes on to argue that the self-perception of unworthiness is exacerbated by Isherwood's homosexuality, which clearly does not fit the "ideal stoic" masculine figure of the interwar period. The film *Cloud Atlas* implies much the same, adapting the story so that Ayrs manipulates Frobisher by threatening to reveal his "degenerate" sexuality. In regards to the book, however, I would argue that Frobisher's sexuality—at least, in terms of his proclivity for men—is not a significant source of inner shame. Frobisher, first of all, is bisexual, and is therefore far better able to join in on the "traditional masculine pursuits" of "playing competitive sports, pursuing women, and drinking to excess" (Stevenson 11), and does at least the second of these with gusto. Secondly, Ayrs never becomes aware of Frobisher's homosexuality—in fact, nobody outside of Rufus Sixsmith, his lover, confidante, and the recipient of his letters, seems to know that he fancies men (unlike in the film, where Frobisher makes a mistaken sexual advance on Ayrs himself). Rather, it is Frobisher's promiscuity with *women* that gets him in trouble—Ayrs threatens to tell "all musical society" that "a scoundrel named Robert Frobisher forced himself upon purblind Vyvyan Ayrs's wife" (*CA* 456); later, Frobisher's misguided and ultimately doomed pursuit of Ayrs's daughter Eva exposes himself to "all those cannibals, feasting on [his] dignity" (*CA* 465). Frobisher's bisexuality, while clearly a reference to the queer youth of the interwar "Auden generation" to which Isherwood belonged, does not play the same key role in "Zedelghem" as it does in *Lions and Shadows*.

While this short analysis is not comprehensive of the elements that Mitchell did and did not borrow from *Lions and Shadows*, I hope it proves the point that coalescence is an ambiguous process. One cannot point to a sentence in *Cloud Atlas* and definitively claim that it belongs to

Isherwood, and then point to the next and say it's from Evelyn Waugh, and the next from Eric Fenby. Art is an encapsulation of our inner world, and our inner world is not so easily sorted; it is cloudy, even to ourselves. In this thesis, I am not trying to dissect each molecule of the cloud—as the Mitchell scholar Sarah Dillon wrote, I "know and welcome the fact that [the texts that we love] exceed us and our ability to explain, analyse, and critique them" (19). I simply hope that by bringing coalescence to the forefront of my literary critique, I can mitigate the artistic shaming that currently hampers any dialogue thereof, and encourage a new discussion that might help artists discover where they came from, and therefore, where they are going.

At the Edge of the Wild: Cross-Coalescence

In the pages of a literal cloud atlas, the coalescent route between Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows* and David Mitchell's would snake across a single spread titled "Literature." This is a realm well-known and well-mapped by scholars; these dog-eared pages are dense with their scribbled notations, their secret passageways, the landmarks they have named for themselves. Having added my own tracings, I now venture to the unmarked margins. Here is the end of the page, the Edge of the Wild[11], the entrance into the neighbor kingdom of Music.

The border between the two artforms of Literature and Music has long been porous. But scholarly cartography of such passages has been inadequate, understandably so—artists (and studiers of artists) feel most comfortable doing their best, most serious work in loyal service of their homelands. A restless artist who wishes to travel beyond must go boldly, unguided, taking care to avoid the precarious twin pitfalls of failure and humiliation—once crossed over, they must blend into an unfamiliar culture, win the trust of suspicious locals, learn the native tongue. Most importantly, they must remain humble and deferential, praising always the foreign land and accepting gladly the mildly irritating but endearing role of curious tourist, nothing more. When questioned, the best reply is a self-deprecating mumble: "Well, no, you see, I'm just a hobbyist." It's kind of like vacationing in France.

There is perhaps no other living writer who does this better than David Mitchell. One can imagine him with an adventurer's hat flopped on his head, bent nearly double under the weight of his backpack, grinning and waving at a crowd of musicians observing him from a chilly

[11] I told you I was reading Tolkien.

distance. “Hullo,” he calls, “Don’t worry, I’m just visiting. *I don’t know my musicological stuff—my fictitious composer’s knowledge has been cribbed from essays in CD booklets*” (actual quote emphasized, “Adventures in Opera”). The musicians relax. This one won’t stay long, they think. Might as well let him in. Mitchell’s holiday drips by, day, week, month, but the musical hosts hardly notice, charmed as they are by their guest’s clever conversation, his quick wit, and, of course, his unflagging modesty. Before they know it, Mitchell’s building a summer cottage there—“*Just one thing leading to another*,” he calls to the neighbors peering over his fence. He hammers on another shingle. “Still don’t know my stuff. It’s all just a *conjuring trick*” (actual quote emphasized, “10 Questions”). The neighbors breathe a sigh of relief and bake him a cake.

Then one day, he deejays a playlist for the BBC (“Paperback Writers”). It includes Sufjan Stevens and the Talking Heads—eclectic, but innocent enough. The next year, he stays in the cottage through the winter, and writes an opera libretto, *Wake* (2010) for the Dutch Nationale Reisopera, and then another, *Sunken Garden* (2013) for the English National Opera. By then, it hardly causes a kerfuffle. He’s become a familiar sight—the barman greets him by name; his neighbors have him over on weekends; his accent, never atrocious to begin with, has faded away so much that visiting locals sometimes mistake him for one of their own. “Easy mistake,” he reassures them, laughing. “You know, sometimes I think that

> everything I could say about music is also true for art in general. And, by extension, true about writing… Writing is a kind of music. And I mean that very nearly literally... A sentence is a musical phrase that your eyeball can hear. (“A Kind of Music”)

So you see, I was never really much of a foreigner, and I do so enjoy this lovely place.” And the musicians are satisfied. Mitchell goes freely from one land to another, delighting citizens of both and feeling always at home.

In addition to the opera librettos, the exemplary product of Mitchell's dual citizenship of Literature and Music is "Letters from Zedelghem," the story of the composer Robert Frobisher. Take, for instance, the following passage, in which Frobisher is auditioning for his post as Ayrs' amanuensis:

> So I sat at the Bösendorfer and played the syphilitic crank "Three Blind Mice," after the fashion of a mordant Prokofiev. Ayrs did not comment. Continued in a subtler vein with Chopin's Nocturne in F Major. He interrupted with a whine, "Trying to slip my petticoats off my ankles, Frobisher?" Played V.A.'s own *Digressions on a Theme of Lodovico Roncalli*, but before the first two bars were out, he'd uttered a six-birch expletive, banged on the floor with his cane, and said, "Self-gratification makes you go blind, didn't they teach you that at Caius?" Ignored him and finished the piece *note perfect*. For a finale of fireworks, gambled on Scarlatti's 212th in A major, a bête noire of arpeggios and acrobatics. (*CA* 53)

The first time I read "Zedelghem," I was convinced that Mitchell must be a long-suffering classically-trained pianist like myself; surely, no lowly hobbyist or simple aficionado could create such a convincingly *musical* persona—but no, Mitchell is simply a genius explorer of artform, a wonderfully talented *coalescer*.

The rest of this thesis will be a sort of analytical travelogue of Mitchell's coalescent crossings between Music and Literature. The following Chapter 3 surveys the souvenirs he's carried "From Music to [the] Literature" of "Zedelghem": biographies of composers, relationships, personalities, compositional histories. Chapter 4, "From Music to Music," studies the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, a fictional musical composition dreamed up entirely in Mitchell's little summer cottage, in an atmosphere of compositional structure, aesthetic philosophy, and

orchestral instrumentation. Chapter 5, "From Literature to Music," is the short coda of this thesis, and can be considered the reverse of Chapter 3. It explores how Reinhold Heil, the previously mentioned composer of the film score of *Cloud Atlas*, adapted Mitchell's novel into music, and includes an interview with Heil himself.

All of these analyses hinge on "Letters from Zedelghem," the second novella of *Cloud Atlas*. As such, I provide a brief summary below.

"Letters from Zedelghem": A Summary

The Characters

Robert Frobisher. The protagonist Frobisher is a young aspiring composer and self-styled rebel, likely close to my own age of 22; a dropout from Caius College, illustrious music school of the University of Cambridge; the estranged son of religious gentry with a nonetheless aristocratic ego. While the wickedly delightful combination of his scathing wit, droll English sarcasm, and youthful arrogance might pin Frobisher as an unreliable narrator, his moments of vulnerability and his exceptionally fine-tuned ear (musically and socially) convince the reader otherwise. The greatest love of his life is music, followed closely by himself and Rupert Sixsmith (see below), then distantly by everything and everyone else.

Vyvyan Ayrs. Ayrs is an aged, once-great composer incapacitated by syphilis who nonetheless maintains an abrasive personality and an ego that rivals (and frequently conflicts with) Frobisher's. His wife's estate, Zedelghem, is on the outskirts of Bruges, Belgium, where he has been living in solitude with his wife, Jocasta, and daughter, Eva, when Frobisher arrives.

Jocasta van Outryve de Crommelynck. Jocasta is Vyvyan Ayrs' caretaker and residing vixen of Zedelghem. Frobisher is one of the numerous visitors that have caught her eye.

Eva Ayrs. Eva, the heiress of Zedelghem, is a prickly school-aged girl who is mistrustful of Frobisher from the moment he arrives. They maintain hostile banter for much of their early interactions, which inevitably explodes into sexual attraction on Frobisher's part later on.

Rupert Sixsmith. Sixsmith is the recipient of Frobisher's letters as well as his gay lover, confidante, and only friend. In "Zedelghem" he functions mostly as a sounding board for Frobisher's story, but he later goes on to play a larger role in the following novella, "Half-Lives: A Luisa Rey Mystery."

The Story

"Letters from Zedelghem," the second novella of *Cloud Atlas*, is written in an epistolary format with letters beginning on June 29, 1931. Frobisher, chased by debtors, hastily decides to leave England and apply unsolicited as Ayrs' amanuensis. Despite some initial clashes, both eventually circumvent their mountainous egos and enter a fruitful working partnership. This relationship erodes as Ayrs refuses to grant Frobisher the credit he believes he deserves on several successful pieces. As a form of revenge, Frobisher begins a subversive affair with Jocasta in August. They just barely escape discovery one night when Ayrs bursts into Frobisher's room to dictate dream-inspired music, music that becomes Ayrs' Nietzsche-inspired composition *Eternal Recurrence*.

The first half of the novella ends here. It restarts 354 pages later.

The first account of the *Cloud Atlas Sextet* comes on October 21, and Frobisher describes it as a linkage of solos voiced in piano, clarinet, cello, flute, oboe, and violin, with each solo "interrupted by its successor" (Mitchell 445). Just as Frobisher is gaining confidence in his original work, he is losing patience with what he sees as Ayrs' plagiarism. Frobisher is only

persuaded to stay on by his fiducial barrenness and his sudden infatuation with Eva, who he believes returns his affections. But on November 11, the strained relationship of the elder and younger composer reaches a breaking point. The fight climaxes when Ayrs reveals that he is fully aware of Jocasta's and Frobisher's affair and is prepared to use the information to destroy Frobisher's musical reputation across Europe unless Frobisher continues his services. Frobisher deserts anyway, hides out in downtown Bruges, and vows to set to work on his only remaining solaces: Eva and the *Cloud Atlas Sextet.* Determined to the point of obsessiveness, Frobisher quickly drives himself to the edges of his sanity, and both pursuits careen to their spectacular ends: the first when he realizes Eva's love was only ever a one-sided delusion, the second when, freed from distractions, his love for music overwhelms all else. On December 12, 1931, he completes his composition and shortly after shoots himself in the head. The *Cloud Atlas Sextet* is the only thing he leaves behind.

The Musical Coalescence of "Letters from Zedelghem"

Frederick Delius and Eric Fenby

In his first "letter from Zedelghem," dated June 29, 1931, Robert Frobisher is in dire straits—broke, kicked out of Caius music school, shamed and largely abandoned by his wealthy family. He surveys his unappetizing options and then chooses to push prudence and practicality aside (the reader will soon learn not for the first or last time, but we will forgive him for this—imprudence and mild delusion are integral parts of his charm) and flee to Zedelghem, the Belgian estate of expatriated English composer Vyvyan Ayrs, "one of the greats" (*CA* 45). Most unfortunately, Frobisher explains, Ayrs has been incapacitated "since the early twenties due to

illness," and Frobisher expects he could use the services of a gifted amanuensis. This daydream was "inspired by a piece in *The Times*" and by a review in the same newspaper of Ayrs' *Secular Magnificat* (*CA* 45).

Here is a playful intersection of fiction and reality. Vyvyan Ayrs is not a composer of our world; *Secular Magnificat* was lauded by a critic that never existed. But on October 29, 1929, *The Times* of London *did* run an article heralding a festival of the complete works of one Frederick Delius, "now in his 68th year, and unhappily, paralysed and blind" ("Frederick Delius"). The article promises an upcoming day-by-day review of the music premiered and honored at the festival before delving into a short biography of Delius, who had been born in England but had lived in Grez-sur-Loing, an artist's village just south of Paris, since 1899.

> Owing to the ill-health which has been encroaching on his activities for a number of years, Delius has been unable to write much new music… Not long ago, however, he found a volunteer amanuensis with whom he has evolved a method of dictation, so that even now it is not too late for us to receive from him the completion of discarded sketches and other new works. ("Frederick Delius")

That amanuensis was one Eric Fenby, and the "illness" plaguing Delius was syphilis.

It turns out that these are not the only details that Mitchell lifted from Fenby's and Delius' relationship. Several of the scenes in "Zedelghem" have been directly reproduced from Fenby's biography *Delius as I Knew Him*, a book cited as one of Mitchell's most important sources of coalescence ("Fantastic Voyage"). Fenby, born in 1906 in Scarborough, England, boldly offered himself as Delius' amanuensis in 1928, a partnership that enabled the older composer's productivity at the end of his life. Frobisher's abysmal first dictation session was exactly Fenby's own experience: while both young men waited with pen poised in trembling

expectation above the manuscript, their masters suddenly and bewilderingly bellowed: "'Tar, tar! Tar-tar-tar tattytattytatty, tar!' Got that? 'Tar! Tatty-tar! Quiet part—tar-tar-tar-ttt-TAR! TARTARTAR!!!'" from Ayrs (*CA* 56) and "'Ter-te-ter—ter-te-ter—ter-te-te-ter.' Hold it! 'ter-te-te-ter!" from Delius (Fenby 31). Both Frobisher and Fenby looked up in panicked amazement, unable to translate a single note, and, once the bellowing subsided, gathered up their nerve and meekly inquired as to the key. "B-flat, *of course*!" Ayrs snapped incredulously (*CA* 56), while his counterpart in Delius retorted "A minor" with a "suggestion of disgust and impatience in his tone" (Fenby 32). Other, subtler parallels include Delius'/Ayrs' "intellectual isolation…inhuman aloofness…penetrating truthfulness…utter contempt for 'the crowd' and utmost fondness for Nietzsche" (Fenby 163); the caretaker role of their respective wives, Jelka and Jocasta; and the conductors that championed and publicized the composers' work: Sir Thomas Beecham for Delius and the fictional Tadeusz Augustowski for Ayrs. Further, Edward Elgar was a contemporary of both Delius and Ayrs and actually made a visit to the homes of both; for the latter, this was a rare undisguised appearance of a historical figure.

In contrast, the similarities between the protagonists themselves, Frobisher and Fenby, seem absent at first glance. Fenby was a self-trained, deeply Christian boy from small-town Yorkshire who fairly quaked in admiration of Delius and never, even after their six-year relationship ended in Delius' death, spoke an ill word against him. Frobisher was created as Fenby's "evil twin" ("Fantastic Voyage"): aristocratic, egotistical, sexually blasphemous. His relationship with Ayrs, of course, collapsed spectacularly. Upon closer inspection, however, these differences are largely superficial. At the time they arrived in the company of their teachers, both men were young—Fenby was 22, Frobisher probably about the same—and both

were in the throes of their one great love: music. "Youth is a strange time," Fenby writes in the opening lines of his book, "and the stuff of Youth is stranger."

> Yet there is one thing the world with all its rottenness cannot take from us, and that is the deep and abiding joy and consolation perpetuate in Great Music. Here the Spirit may find home and relief when all else fails. It offers an 'open sesame' to a world of contentment such as naught can offer in this brief sojourn here, until at last we shall be brought into the presence of that 'Eternal Light which loves and smiles.' (Fenby 3)

Both Fenby and Frobisher succeeded in finding their way to this "Eternal Light" in a way that they believed their predecessors hadn't. Fenby regretted that "that joy which is not to be found in [Delius'] music, and which constitutes its chief defect" could have been discovered if only Delius had submitted to Christianity; he blamed Nietzsche for "the poison entered into [Delius'] soul" (Fenby 170-1). Similarly, Frobisher thought Ayrs had reduced his talent by spending it in "dribs and drabs over a dragged-out lifetime" (*CA* 461) and chose rather to, in his characteristic impetuous way, stake it all on his "incomparable creation" (*CA* 470), the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. For Frobisher, the "eternity of eternities" promised him by this magnum opus was equivalent to Fenby's Christian heaven (*CA* 471), the seat of the sublime.

Edward Elgar and William Henry Reed

Eric Fenby considered Sir Edward Elgar "the only English composer, probably the only composer, who has given perfect expression to that rarest and sublimest of all moods…the mood which savours of that heavenly world wherein lies our destiny" (Fenby 4). Elgar, who was just five years older than Frederick Delius and who died in the same year of 1934, nevertheless rarely

directly met with either Delius or Fenby, although their tracks frequently seemed to run in parallel.

For one, Elgar also maintained a close and well-known musical partnership; in his case, with the violinist William H. Reed. In "Zedelghem," Frobisher referred to Elgar's and Reed's relationship as a composer working with a "virtuoso musician to explore the boundaries of the playable" (*CA* 454), as Elgar would often use Reed as something like a beta tester so that he might adjust bowings, accents, dynamics, etc. before the official debut of a composition. Reed first met Elgar in 1902 when he abandoned his rehearsal to chase after the great composer and breathlessly beg him to teach him "lessons in harmony, counterpoint, etc." Elgar responded with characteristic affable reticence: "My dear boy, I don't know anything about those things" (Reed 21). Nevertheless, the daringness of Reed's request must have impressed him (as with Fenby/Delius and Frobisher/Ayrs), and the two would remain great friends until his death, which was followed two years later by the publication of Reed's biography *Elgar as I Knew Him*, the very same year Fenby published *Delius as I Knew Him*. (If Frobisher had lived longer, might the world have seen an *Ayrs as I Knew Him*? Although his depiction would have surely been far less flattering.)

One incident in particular is included in both Reed's and Fenby's books: in the winter of 1932-33, Sir Edward Elgar visited Frederick Delius at his home in Grez-sur-Loing for the first and last time. Reed recounts how in Delius, Elgar found a rare "kindred spirit" (Reed 106), having "chatted together and discussed the state of music…as if they were in the habit of having friendly meetings every day" (Reed 105). Similarly, Delius apparently found Elgar "very genial and natural and altogether quite unlike what [Delius] had expected [Elgar] to be" (Fenby 123).

As with the dictation session, Mitchell heavily borrowed from Fenby's account of this visit (*CA* 82), replacing the pleasantly surprised Delius with Ayrs. Like Delius, Ayrs was flattered by the visit of such an important guest, despite his usual relentless criticism of his fellow English composers (in fact, Delius was not afraid to skewer Elgar's oratorios right to the composer's face). And in both the fictional and historical story, Elgar complimented his host on the handy acquisition of an amanuensis and his resultant newfound productivity. But while said amanuensis Fenby had a longstanding deep admiration for Elgar's music and was flattered by his attention, Frobisher listened to Elgar and Ayrs converse with a mix of reluctant respect and contempt, ruefully composing a piece in his head depicting the two old men, Delius, and Trevor Mackerras (Frobisher's loathed ex-professor at Caius) called *The Backstreet Museum of Stuffed Edwardians* (*CA* 84).

Frobisher's dislike for other composers, however, was certainly not total. Throughout "Zedelghem," he references other musicians and their work with the same dexterity that Mitchell did writers in his "Art of Fiction" interview, including Vaughn Williams (*CA* 46), Noyes (46), Saint-Saëns (50), Liszt (77), Schumann (466), Scriabin (470), Stravinsky (470), Debussy (470).[12] One can imagine Frobisher as an eager coalescer: curating a vast record collection, poring over stacks of orchestral scores, jotting down cramped notes in the margins of textbooks and biographies. Yet his natural arrogance, his cynical mistrust in others, his sense of superiority to "Mackerras the Jackass with his Merry Band of Onanists" (*CA* 61)—so contrary to Mitchell's characteristic modesty—compels him to dispel with any external dependencies. This paradox in Frobisher's character is an example of the common mental struggle caused by coalescence: artists know how much they owe to other artists, but, whether out of delusion or arrogance, they

[12] These last three were explicit inspirations of Frobisher's last and greatest work. Please see Chapter 4.

often avoid acknowledging it, even to themselves. More kindly, such denial might be said to be an inevitable consequence of time—with enough fame and fortune, one tends to forget where they came from.

Delius and Elgar are exemplary cases—after years of developing and gaining recognition for their distinctive musical styles, they looked around, declared themselves peerless, and logically concluded that they had birthed themselves. And having attained such a godly status, they found no need for anyone else: the two men grew "little interested in the work of any other artist" (Fenby 195, Reed 150), as well as in public opinion and critical analysis of their own work. To this disregard they attributed the power to "stamp his own individuality upon his work," asserting that "if a composer stopped to think what effect the work he was creating was likely to have upon others, he would in all likelihood never achieve anything of artistic value or permanence" (Reed 127). This, in my opinion, was mixing up the chicken and the egg: contempt didn't lead to musical success, musical success led to contempt. It is little wonder that once they declared coalescence useless and ended their practice of it, the quality of their music deteriorated.[13]

Admittedly, the sort of self-sufficient artistic persona adopted by Delius and Elgar is alluring, if unrealistic. It allows one to view oneself as a prodigy of invention, a true revolutionary (as opposed to Bartók's *evolution*ary), alone perceptive and courageous enough to refute the conventions of the masses. A *Times* journalist, glowingly reflecting on the 1929 Delius festival, characterized it best:

[13] This is actually a well-documented psychological phenomenon called "cognitive entrenchment": high level stability in one's domain schemas. A consequence is that creative productivity tends to deteriorate 20 years into one's domain of expertise; earlier for artists and conceptual professionals (Simonton).

> He belongs to no nation or period or school, for there are in him too many contradictions. This constitutes the strength of his appeal. He is as little likely to influence those who come after him as he has been influenced by those who have gone before. He is himself alone, and his uniqueness will ensure him a lasting shrine in one of the quiet and shady groves of the temple of music. ("A Retrospect")

Now, who *wouldn't* want a quiet and shady grove in a temple? It sounds like the sort of home that might be lusted after by Christopher Isherwood's "day-dream self-portrait" of "Isherwood the Artist":

> Isherwood the artist was an austere ascetic, cut off from the outside world, in voluntary exile, a recluse… He stood apart from and above "The Test"—because the Test was something for the common herd, it applied only to the world of everyday life. Isherwood refused the Test—not out of weakness, not out of cowardice, but because he was subjected, daily, hourly, to a "Test" of his own: the self-imposed Test of his integrity as a writer. (97-98)

The difference, of course, is that Isherwood was gently mocking himself, while Delius and Elgar were deadly serious. Delius, in declaring himself free from coalescence, had forgotten that his "extremely individual and personal idiom" ("First Concert") was incubated by "Wagner, whose endless flow and harmonic aura Delius attempted to emulate, and [by] Grieg, whose airy texture and non-developing use of chromaticism showed him how to lighten the Wagnerian load" (Payne); also by American slave songs, by English folk music, by "the Nietzchean conception of life as dance" (Foss 33). Elgar, too, coalesced Purcell, Handel, Dvořák, Brahms, Berlioz, Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Delibes (Kennedy 10, Cox 15-16).

Perhaps Frobisher, given the time, would have also turned into an isolationist. Perhaps he would have thrown away his records and burned his scores, confident that his own work was enough to sustain him. His art would have starved.

Maybe the characteristic aversion to coalescence has an easy explanation. Maybe these characters simply dislike other people, and thus resent any implication of obligation. Many passersby in Delius', Elgar's, and Frobisher's lives found the composers aloof, even offensive—Reed recalls an amusing story of a foreign woman rushing up to Elgar after one of his concerts "in a gushing torrent of American adoration," and being crestfallen when he only "stared at her coldly and walked off upstairs to his room" (Reed 76). He blamed Elgar's standoffishness on social anxiety, promising that Elgar in fact "was the soul of courtesy and had the kindest heart in the world" (Reed 78). Delius had not even this private redemption: even Fenby described him as "proud, cynical, godless, completely self-absorbed" (Fenby 191).

I wonder, though, if this prickly personality was really a means of defense. Isherwood was attracted to "Isherwood the Artist" because it was a way to self-justifiably escape The Test, his greatest fear. But deep down, he knew that underneath the cool exterior of the Artist was just "plain, cold, uninteresting funk. Funk of getting too deeply involved with other people, sex-funk, funk of the future" (Isherwood 304). Likewise, perhaps Frobisher, Delius, and Elgar so ostentatiously decided not to care about The Test of social acceptance because, in the darkest corners of their hearts, they were deeply afraid they would fail. It's a sad idea, one that possibly explains Delius's recurring themes of "nostalgia, regret, disheartened-ness…with which his music vibrates in most natural sympathy" ("A Retrospect"); an overwhelming sympathy for others, an oversensitivity to the merciless gaze of our fellow humans, must be hidden away and guarded. *Sunt lacrimae rerum* ("These men know the pathos of life, and mortal things touch their

hearts"[14]) was the closing line of Frobisher's suicide letter. This quote from the *Aeneid*, comments a particularly astute *Times* critic, seems to be always "the thought at the back of [Delius's] mind" ("First Concert").

Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud

"You're my Verlaine," says Frobisher to Ayrs (*CA* 81). Ayrs' wife's breath warms Frobisher's leg beneath the blankets. Amanuensis and master face each other, midnight, the first aroused by the promise of unfaithful sex, the second by a sudden strike of musical inspiration.

"Am I, young Rimbaud?" Ayrs replies, "mawkish." "Then where is your *Saison en Enfer*?"

"In sketches, in my skull, in my gut, Ayrs. In my future," Frobisher promises (*CA* 81).

An odd comparison, considering that Verlaine and Rimbaud are perhaps best known for, besides their poetry, their turbulent gay relationship, while in this particular scene we find Frobisher, caught mid-heterosexual coitus, conversing with a man dying of syphilis. But look at a portrait of Arthur Rimbaud, boy poet extraordinaire, and you can easily envision young Frobisher in that half-sullen straight set of his mouth, the disdainful eyebrow, the thick hair haphazardly parted. Those "strikingly beautiful eyes…of an astonishing depth and tenderness" (Ivry 11-12). Frobisher is Rimbaud in his youthfulness, his megalomania, his intemperate libido, his sometimes violent fits of temper, and ultimately, in his genius.

[14] While this translation by Kenneth Clark best reflects the context of the *Aeneid*, my personal favorite version is by the poet Seamus Heaney: "There are tears at the heart of things."

Rimbaud, aged 17, by Étienne Carjat

Arthur Rimbaud was born October 20, 1854. His literary productivity began in 1869, when he was fifteen years old, and was finished by the time he was twenty, a short brilliant supernova of a career that "expanded ideas of what language can do in poetry" (Ivry 7). Echoing the epistolary style of "Zedelghem," Rimbaud was a prolific letter writer, letters that reveal the development of his revolutionary literary ideas as well as offer insight into his personal relationships. It was through letters that Rimbaud first contacted Paul Verlaine in September 1871, a friend of a friend and already a well-respected poet with an "unusual musical sensitivity to the sound of the language" (Ivry 31).[15] Earlier that same year, Rimbaud had written a now-famous letter to the poet Paul Demeny, dated May 15—in it he established his idea of the disfigured self as the agent of poetry, a self that was "willfully distended and distressed, offering the maximum surface area to which unusual information (the 'unknown') can adhere" (Harding and Sturrock xxiv):

I say you must be a *seer*, make yourself a *seer.*

[15] This characterization is the (admittedly weak) justification for why this pair is included in this chapter. Poetry, I think, is the necessary throughway between Literature and Music.

> The Poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, immense, and reasoned *disordering* of *all the senses*... He arrives at the unknown, and even though he may be demented and lose the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them! So what if he dies as he bounds through unheard-of, unnameable things: other horrible toilers will come; they'll begin at the horizons where he has gone under! (emphasis original, Harding and Sturrock 239)

It was in pursuit of "new ways of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and otherwise perceiving experience" that he traveled to Paris at Verlaine's invitation (Ivry 27), carrying for Verlaine's viewing a poem that would become known as one of his greatest, "Le Bateau Ivre," "Drunken Boat."

Like Rimbaud, Frobisher is a precocious schoolboy who ran afoul of his parents and peers as a function of his often antagonistic brilliance, and thereafter found his own way through somewhat purposeful self-destruction, a side effect of ego and an insufferable personality. And like Rimbaud, Frobisher's sensory abilities defies the standard, in that his auditory musical experience dominates his perception of the world. Evidence of this is ubiquitous in "Letters"; some examples: "a crashing noise, an august chord rang out, half-cello, half-celeste, D major (?), held for four beats" (*CA* 43), "downtrodden scriveners hurtling by like demisemiquavers in a Beethovian allegro" (*CA* 44), "ten bars of silence in 6/8" (*CA* 455). Frobisher could well be considered a Rimbaudian "seer," and, as forewarned, he arrives at the "unknown" in a state of ruin that culminates in his suicide. At the end of November, working on the *Sextet*, he writes in a near-hysterical frenzy:

> Lifetime's music, arriving all at once. Boundaries between noise and sound are conventions, I see now. All boundaries are conventions, national ones too. One may transcend any convention, if only one can first conceive of doing so… When it's finished,

there'll be nothing left in me, I know, but this king's shilling in my sweaty palm is the philosopher's stone! (*CA* 460-461)

In this regard, the *Sextet* is more analogic to "Drunk Boat" than *Saison en Enfer,* a piece written mid-1873 after a violent end to Rimbaud's relationship with Verlaine, in which Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the wrist and was subsequently imprisoned. *Saison* represented a drastic reversal of Rimbaud's previous literary theory; it was his "seer's recantation" of his "visionary scheme…along with the relationship with Verlaine, the vanity of the seer-project and everything it entailed" (Harding and Sturrock xxx). Ayrs' reference to *Saison* hints at the future breakup of mentor and mentee and is an allusion to Frobisher's bisexuality—despite the affair with Jocasta, Ayrs' wife, and a brief infatuation with Eva, Ayrs' daughter, Frobisher calls Rufus Sixsmith, the recipient of his letters, "the sole love of [his] short, bright life" (*CA* 470). Otherwise, Frobisher is the Rimbaud of "Drunken Boat," a young revolutionary dedicated to and ruled by a fusion of the senses.

Friedrich Schiller and Ludwig van Beethoven

On December 2 or 3, around 10 days before he kills himself, Frobisher "scored 102 bars of a funereal march based on 'Ode to Joy' for my clarinetist" (*CA* 466), an allusion to Beethoven's celebrated melody in the final movement of Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125. The lyrics of that melody were derived from the poem "An die Freude" ("Ode to Joy") by Friedrich Schiller, a German "dramatist, poet, and literary theorist" ("Friedrich").

"An die Freude," published in 1785, was a *geselliges Lied*, a "social song," designed to be sung by friends intoxicated in both body and spirit—it was this adaptability and contemporary popularity that led to the work being set to music no fewer than forty times before the

publication of its most famous rendering in the Ninth Symphony in 1824. Despite this lag, however, Beethoven was an early admirer of the poem; the first indication of his wish to set it to music came as early as 1792. Over the next three decades, amid a flurry of compositional productivity, the Ninth Symphony would slowly coalesce into its full form to become one of the most enduring pieces of music of all time.

Meanwhile, even as Beethoven was inspired to create an unparalleled derivation, Schiller was becoming disillusioned with the inspiration itself. On October 21, 1800, he wrote:

> "Die Freude" is…I now feel, entirely flawed. Even though it occasionally impressed by dint of a certain fire of expression, it still remains a bad poem and represents a stage of my development that I since have left behind in order to produce something respectable. But because it corresponded with the flawed taste of its time, it has achieved an honor tantamount to a folk poem. (Levy 10)

Having since lived through the French Revolution, Reign of Terror, and the Napoleonic Era, Schiller likely found his simple, optimistic conception of *Freude* ("joy") immature and undeveloped, and indeed, despite its mass popularity, the poem is considered an example of Schiller's lesser work. Following the publication of the poem, he would go on to refine his idea of *Freude* in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1795 and his essay "Concerning the Sublime" in 1801. Building on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Schiller asserted that *Freude* was "not only a merging of head and heart but also a synthesis of those forces that motivate humanity as part of the worldly here and now and as moral beings—that is, as beings that aspire to the infinite" (Parsons 12). The attainment of Joy/Enlightenment, Schiller says, requires a balance of our place in the finiteness of our lives and in the infiniteness of the universe, a balance between rationality and feeling, the "sublime." This idea apparently struck a chord with

Beethoven, who famously copied down a line from Kant in his notebook: "The mortal law within us, and the starry heavens above."

According to Schiller and other Enlightenment thinkers, artists were "herald, mediator, and secular prophet rolled into one" (Parsons 14), best equipped and thus responsible for leading humankind to *Freude*. The genius of true artists, Johann Goethe added, would light the road ahead in a brilliant blaze, enabling the artist to "cross back and forth between the borders separating the finite and infinite, the subjective and objective, the rational and irrational" (Parsons 15). Beethoven would endorse this idea of artist as messiah, writing in 1812 that "only art and science would raise men to the level of gods" (Parsons 16).

"How vulgar, this hankering after immortality," says Frobisher about this self-aggrandizing perspective, "how vain, how false" (*CA* 81). "Genius" as defined by Goethe, Kant, and Schiller is a qualified label, and Frobisher is increasingly contemptuous of Ayrs' aspiration to that vainglorious perception as pursuer of Enlightenment, leader of lesser, deliverer of humanity. Frobisher was, of course, originally motivated to travel to Zedelghem by a deep admiration for Ayrs, who he called "the only Briton of his generation to reject pomp, circumstance, rusticity, and charm" (*CA* 45), a subtle jab at not only Elgar, composer of the perpetually popular *Pomp and Circumstance*, but also more generally at poets like Schiller, who with "An die Freude" indulged instead of challenged. And despite the way Ayrs' cantankerous attitude severely rankles Frobisher's ego (he sullenly threatens to run away more than once), he admits, "Irascible as Ayrs is, he's one of the few men in Europe whose influence I want my own creativity informed by. Musicologically, he's Janus-headed" (*CA* 61).

But following his dramatic breakup with Ayrs, Frobisher, like Schiller, replaces regard with scorn. "A man like Ayrs spends his allotted portion in dribs and drabs over a dragged-out

lifetime," Frobisher sneers, "Not I" (*CA* 461). If Schiller's "An die Freude" and Ayrs' *Eternal Recurrence* failed to "resolve the inherent tension between reason and feeling" by a myopic, misconceived vision of artistry and a squandering of genius (Parsons 13), then Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Frobisher's *Cloud Atlas Sextet* was a rectification of their progenitors' mistakes.

In his last letter, his suicide note, Frobisher calls the *Sextet* an "incomparable creation," one which he has poured the entirety of himself into, converting his physical body—an insignificant thing he dismisses as a "mass of tubes squeezing semisolids around itself" (*CA* 470)—into enduring music, music for an "eternity of eternities" (*CA* 471). Yet Frobisher was, even unconsciously, inspired by his deficient master, whose methods inspired his "language in exciting ways" (*CA* 61). Frobisher describes the *Sextet* as a "waking dream" (*CA* 470), evocative of Ayrs' midnight inspiration for *Eternal Recurrence*, a piece with "four movements, a female choir, and a large ensemble heavy in Ayrsesque woodwind" (*CA* 84). Coincidentally, Frobisher's *Ode to Joy* movement is played by clarinet, a mainstay woodwind, and *Ode to Joy*, i.e., the Ninth Symphony, is in four movements and was famously and radically the first symphony to incorporate a major choral element. Strike *coincidentally.*

Part of Frobisher's coalescence for the *Sextet* was undeniably Ayrs' work, as much as he loathed to admit it, but coalescence is also always transformative, evolutionary. Frobisher ultimately had nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide—the *Sextet* was always simultaneously both his and Ayrs's…and Delius's, Elgar's, Beethoven's, their predecessors, their predecessors' predecessors, and so on. The *Sextet* is an entire universe of coalescence, and itself will undoubtedly become a small part of another universe: it is concurrently insignificant and

essential, an infinitesimal point on an infinite atlas made up of such points. This is how Schiller's artist transcends mortal boundaries and joins the infinite, how he becomes the pilgrim to *Freude*.

Likewise, in the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven evolves Schiller's poem to the heights Schiller idealized in his *Letters* and "Concerning the Sublime." There is evidence that Beethoven was a fervent student of Schiller's work and incorporated it into predecessors of the Ninth Symphony, notably *Choral Fantasy, Op. 80* as well as the Symphony itself, both literarily in the chorus and musically in the orchestra (Parsons 21). Several musical techniques were employed to literally harmonize opposing ideas of the "mundane and sublime…the secular and the sacred" (Parsons 24). For example, pure accompanying music progresses to a burst of chorus rejoicing and singing, "Do you fall down millions? Do you sense the creator, world? Seek him above the starry vault, he must live above the stars." Parsons suggests:

> The trajectory of the…"Joy" melody from the "naturalness" and simplicity of its initial presentation through its subsequent elaborations suggests a narrative progression emanating from the realm of nature. In eighteenth-century thought, *Freude* was viewed as both a goal and a return to ultimate beginnings. (Parsons 30)

In this circular, paradoxical definition, coalescence is *Freude*—a balance between the "beginnings" of musical education and inspiration, and the "goal" of an original work of art. This is the "indelible truth," the "elegant certainty" (*CA* 471) that comforted Frobisher even as he faced his end, his suicide—he knew, with joy in his heart, that the beginning was inevitable.

RECAPITULATION: FROM MUSIC TO MUSIC

The Musical Coalescence of the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*

> Echoes of Scriabin's *White Mass*, Stravinsky's lost footprints, chromatics of the more lunar Debussy, but truth is I don't know where it came from. Waking dream. Will never write anything one-hundredth as good. Wish I were being immodest, but I'm not. *Cloud Atlas Sextet* holds my life, is my life, now I'm a spent firework; but at least I've been a firework. (*CA* 470)

The *Cloud Atlas Sextet* is two things. First, it is the defining symbol of Frobisher's life, the culmination of a lifetime's worth of musical coalescence. In analyzing it as such, I will treat the *Sextet* as if were an actual piece of music, one than be performed and listened to and criticized, although, of course, it is in reality a fictional composition that exists only on a diegetic level.[16] This effort may appear rather pointless (why bother constructing and analyzing something that isn't even real?), but—beyond being a fun exercise in itself—analysis of the *Sextet* can and does uncover deeper truths about *Cloud Atlas* the novel, the ultimate subject of this thesis. This is because the *Sextet*'s second function is as a metafictional symbol of the novel. As described in Chapter 3.2, the *Sextet* is "for overlapping soloists: piano, clarinet, 'cello, flute, oboe, and violin, each in its own language of key, scale, and color. In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, in order" (*CA* 445). Likewise, *Cloud Atlas* the novel is a compilation of six novellas ("solos"), each one interrupted and recontinued, each written in their own languages of genre, character, and style ("key, scale, and color"). And

[16] Not to be confused with the track from the film by the same name, which is an extra-diegetic musical work; i.e., one that exists on the reader's level of reality. This particular work will be treated in greater detail in Chapter 5.

in having Frobisher ask himself, "Revolutionary or gimmicky?"[17], Mitchell seems to be preempting critics by acknowledging that his own literary structural experiment may, to some, fall flat. When I conclude whether Frobisher's *Sextet* is indeed gimmicky or not, I am answering the same question about Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*.

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter is the most explicit description of the *Sextet*'s coalescent sources, although there are many more scattered throughout "Zedelghem." Scriabin, Stravinsky, and Debussy likely influenced Frobisher in terms of musical theory (melody, harmony, counterpoint, etc.), and, while I do lightly delve into these topics in this chapter, I am unfortunately ill-equipped for a complete theoretical dissection. That is, I do not have the training necessary to faithfully interpret and compose a real version of the *Sextet* as a coalescence of the pitches and rhythms stylistically employed by these three composers.[18] Instead, this chapter concerns not *what* Scriabin, Stravinsky, and Debussy created, but *how* they created.

I give away the ending here: *Scrabin, Stravinsky, Debussy, and ultimately, Frobisher, saw their music as symbols of "something greater," of which they were spiritually a part.* For each of the composers, the "something greater" could not have been more different. For Frobisher, it was the greater story of *Cloud Atlas*, in which he was a link in a chain of reincarnated, connected souls. Scriabin believed in a greater God-like consciousness borne from an idiomatic, frankly bizarre mysticism. Stravinsky composed in service of the greater Russian Orthodox Church, of which he was a fervent member. Finally, Debussy's music reflected greater

[17] There is Bartók's hated term again: "revolutionary." In this case, too, it is inaccurate. Italo Calvino wrote interrupting narratives (albeit unfinished) in his 1979 novel *If on a winter's night a traveler*, a book that "magnetized" Mitchell as an undergraduate. The concept of *Cloud Atlas* was originally inspired when Mitchell asked himself: "What would a novel where interrupted narratives are continued later look like?" ("Enter the Maze")
[18] If this is what the curious reader is searching for, I encourage you to heed Vyvyan Ayrs' advice: "If they want to know 'what I mean' they should listen to my bloody music" (*CA* 71). I assure you that listening to the work of Scriabin, Stravinsky, and Debussy will tell you more than I ever can.

Nature, where he felt Man ultimately belonged. But the commonalities between all were the *distinctness* of the Greater and the *simultaneous internality and externality* of the Greater. By this I mean: mysticism, religion, and nature had a defined and palpable effect on the composers' music, and while these Greater elements ultimately transcended the mortal lives of the composer, they were at the same time highly personal, highly expressive of the spiritual essence of the individual. In the following chapter, I explore how Scriabin's, Stravinsky's, and Debussy's relationship with the Greater corresponded with Frobisher's relationship with *Cloud Atlas.*

"Echoes of Scriabin's *White Mass*"

To understand Alexander Scriabin's (1872-1915) *Mysterium* is to understand Alexander Scriabin's idiomatic mysticism and his music (which are almost literally the same thing), and therefore understand Scriabin himself.

> Scriabin envisioned [the *Mysterium*] as a kind of immense liturgical rite, lasting seven days or perhaps longer and set against the backdrop of the Himalayas in India, during which the barrier between audience and performers would be dissolved to allow for a spiritual communion leading to an ecstatic dissolution and transfiguration of the world. All would perform and celebrate. All of the arts would be included—music, dance, theater, poetry, visual colors. All of the senses too would be engaged—even taste and smell. Scriabin planned for bells to be dangling from the clouds and perfumes to be wafted. The *Mysterium* was a festival that would, by employing all the arts, allow for a transcendence of them and usher humanity into a new and more satisfying plane of existence… (Garcia 475-476)

Scriabin began nursing the idea of the *Mysterium* as early as 1901, towards the end of his life and career. It might be said that the *Mysterium* is (or rather, would have been) the product of a lifetime's worth of coalescence. Indeed, the scholar Emanuel Garcia traces its ultimate Freudian roots back to *even before he was born*, theorizing that prenatal Scriabin was influenced by his pregnant mother's piano performances, and that the *Mysterium* was ultimately an attempt to return to the utopic womb. More tangible elements of Scriabin's coalescent brew include "the Russian Symbolist movement and the Theosophical doctrines of Blavatsky; he read Bal'mont, Trubetskoy, Solovyov, and many others—all in his own peculiar way, assimilating what he felt would be important to his own evolving ideas" (Garcia 476). Garcia makes the valid point that the examination of coalescence is closely related to psychoanalysis (and also, I would note, the neuroscience of memory and will), and emphasizes the same essentialness thereof that I seek to convey in this thesis. I borrow his words here as my own credo:

> The architecture of the mind is such that the oldest structures exist alongside more recent ones, and the most primitive pleasures and complexes and conflicts underlie and permeate their successors, giving testament to the infinite richness of human experience. *But the majesty of artistic aspiration is made no less wondrous by a keener understanding of its unconscious roots.* Indeed, may we not discern through Scriabin the pilgrimage of every great artist who in reaching for a lost and impossible realm of the remotest personal past bequeaths to the world works that enrich and elevate our future? (emphasis original, 481)

Scriabin's "lost and impossible realm of the remotest personal past" might have been as distant as the prenatal environment, but Frobisher reached even farther—with the *Sextet*, he was

coalescing *previous lifetimes*.[19] The creation of Scriabin's *Mysterium* through the framework of mysticism and the creation of Frobisher's *Sextet* through the framework of reincarnation are one and the same: they are the "pilgrimages" of coalescence.

Scriabin's *Mysterium*, however, was never realized. He died of septicemia in 1915, and the shimmering idea of his last and greatest project died with him. The closest thing he left behind are those piano sonatas written in service of the *Mysterium*—Nos. 6 through 10, particularly No. 7, Op. 64, otherwise known as *White Mass*. With this sonata, Scriabin achieved a prototype of the "spiritual communion" that was the objective of the *Mysterium*. He called this communion the universal "I," as opposed to the individual "I" (that is, the individual we recognize as Alexander Scriabin), and the concept of his own godliness arose from an ecstatic state wherein these two "I's" were one and the same. He was simultaneously "a microcosm, a cosmos in miniature, a reflection of the universe" *and* the "macrocosm," the infinite omni-consciousness existing beyond space and time that is often personified as God (Schloezer 142). It was this ecstatic state that was "crystallized in musical sound" in *White Mass*, Piano Sonata No. 7, Op. 64 (Schloezer 148), and because of this it was Scriabin's personal favorite piece, the fulfillment of "his sainthood and manifest dematerialization" (Bowers 231).

A key characteristic of Scriabin's music is that he considered it not as a *constructed representation* of his universal "I," but more as a *channel*. Scriabin literally believed that his music *was* the voice of the cosmos. There was no mediator between Scriabin's inner world and the listener's inner world; there was simply a direct connection. Imagine, for instance, that instead of communicating through the mediator (the symbols) of voiced language, you were

[19] Although only "Pacific Journal" precedes Frobisher's story in *Cloud Atlas*, the implied circularity of time—Nietzsche's eternally spinning "gramophone record" (*CA* 471)—makes it so that all six lifetimes exist in both Frobisher's past and future.

telepathic, and could understand in a flash all of another person's complex emotion and rationale and personality and all the rest that makes up who someone is. That was what Scriabin intended his music to do.

Scriabin believed that at least part of the voice of the cosmos was the "mystic chord" (otherwise known as the Prometheus chord for its use in his symphonic poem *Prometheus*), which was the harmonic basis of *White Mass* and indeed, all of Scriabin's later work. Briefly, the Prometheus chord is a collection of six pitches selected from an overtone progression. Overtones are physical phenomena that occur because an oscillator (like a piano string) is vibrating at multiple frequencies, producing the effect of multiple tones hidden within the fundamental tone, which a sensitive ear can detect. For Scriabin, this unique construction of the Prometheus chord was *not* just a symbol of "a beam of light, passing through a prism, divid[ing] itself into several constituent colors, which in their aggregate represent that fundamental beam of light," as Vladimir Padwa suggests (496); Padwa goes on to theorize that the light symbolizes the illuminative power of Prometheus; Prometheus, in turn, symbolizes an "instant apprehension of…what was in essence beyond the mind of man to conceptualize" (Taruskin). Rather, Scriabin hurdled all of these thoughtfully constructed intermediating layers and raced straight to the end, to that "essence beyond": *the mystic chord was simply the voice of the universe*. This was not just his unique *interpretation* of that voice; it was the bare, unadulterated voice falling like a blessing on all of our ears.

Did Frobisher, too, "channel" rather than represent his "greater story"? It is apparent to me that his *Cloud Atlas Sextet* at least borrowed a mood of ecstasy from *White Mass*, the ecstasy that explodes at the moment of simultaneity of microcosm and macrocosm. Both the *Sextet* and *Cloud Atlas* the novel are different versions of the same mystical macrocosm, containing within

them the individual microcosms of the six solos/novellas. Through their perfect union the listener/reader achieves a sense of soaring, a fearless awareness of infinity, a feeling of peace and fulfillment and joy—when Luisa Rey heard the *Sextet*, she described the sound as "pristine, river-like, spectral, hypnotic….as if living in a stream of time" (*CA* 408). However, neither the *Sextet*, nor the book it represents, can be said to be as direct as Scriabin's method. The abstraction that Frobisher/Mitchell wish to symbolize—the cyclicality of time—is very intentionally constructed and refined through the experimental interrupting structure of the solos/novellas and through the use of different "voices," the distinct styles of the novellas and instrumentations of the solos. The structure and voice become the mediator between what the artist intends and what the reader/listener receives, the membrane between the world inside and outside of man. For Scriabin, no such mediator existed.

I do not wish to comment on the superiority of Scriabin's method or lack thereof; I firmly believe that such an exercise would be both superficial and futile. I only wish to appreciate how Scriabin's mystic creed illuminates Frobisher's/Mitchell's work in counterpoint and harmony, and point out the striking similarity of the underlying processes despite the differences in space and time—the enduring and eternal process of coalescence. Indeed, Mitchell's 21st century novel seems to breathe life into Scriabin's notebooks, dating from 1903-1905:

> Individual consciousnesses differ only in their contents, but the bearers of these contents are identical. They are beyond space and time. We are faced here not with a multiplicity of conscious states, but with a universal consciousness that experiences a multitude of states of consciousness vertically (in time) and horizontally (in space). We should not be surprised by a world in which the same consciousness reveals itself in different individuals. (Schloezer 124)

It is hardly necessary to point out that Mitchell's fictional world is exactly that.

"Stravinsky's lost footprints"

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) was a known contemporary of Scriabin, although the two were on opposite sides of the ferocious St. Petersburg/Moscow artistic rivalry. Perhaps as a result, the two composers did not maintain a particularly close friendship—they met for the first and only time on October 6, 1913, after the young and relatively unknown Stravinsky sent Scriabin an adoring letter: "Yesterday I played your 7th Sonata [*White Mass*] again and my opinion has not changed. I await you eagerly so I can show you and tell you what I like so especially in it…" (Bowers 248). Following Scriabin's death not two years later, Stravinsky's opinion of Scriabin evolved from admiration into utter distaste and then reluctant respect. For Scriabin's part, he was never anything but contemptuous of his colleague, accusing Stravinsky's music of "*minimum tvorchestvo*," a "minimum of creativity" (Bowers 249).

Even if the two great Russians had had greater opportunity to meet, they would have been hard-pressed to find common ground. A far cry from Scriabin's freewheeling brand of mysticism, Stravinsky was Eastern Orthodox in culture and religion for significant periods of his life, a strain of Christianity that emphasizes a strictly ordered form of worship and way of life. For Stravinsky, his compositions were a form of that worship; accordingly, he despised sentimentality, subjectivity, and egotism in music, especially in religious music, which he purported to "travel beyond the upheaval of emotions to the contemplation of the divine" (Gillion 12). His glorification of objectivity is obvious in his admiration for a conductor he observed in his adolescence:

> Certainty and unbending rigor in the exercise of his art; complete contempt for all affectation and showy effects alike in the presentation of the work and in gesticulation; not the slightest concession to the public; and added to that, iron discipline, mastery of the first order, an infallible ear and memory, and, as a result, perfect clarity and objectivity in the rendering… What better can one imagine? (Stravinsky 10)

These were the inextricably Russian Orthodox traits that Stravinsky strove to imbue in his own work, in stark opposition of Scriabin's glorification of the subjective self.

At first glance, Stravinsky's religious strictures similarly seem a far cry from Frobisher's propensity for debauchery and slightly unhinged flair—a particularly appropriate example would be when he crashed a party and "roared Eva's name, over and over, like a spoilt child in a temper tantrum, until the dance music collapsed and the hallway and stairs were packed with shocked revelers" (*CA* 464) in an attempt to woo her…after sleeping with her mother. However, Frobisher came from a family whose power and reputation were founded in religion—his father was a well-respected rector. Frobisher may have lived his life in direct rebellion of his family, but the things we oppose tend to define us as much as the things we uphold. It is not difficult to imagine that, like Stravinsky, Frobisher's religious upbringing molded the malleable memory of his childhood, and found its way into his *Sextet*.

Stravinsky's faith in the Orthodox Church underwent an important rejuvenation in 1926; in fact, "it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of Stravinsky's rediscovery in music of his religious self" (Walsh 44). *Symphony of Psalms*, composed in 1930, was a direct result. I owe it to *Slate* blogger J. Bryan Lowder for initially deciphering Frobisher's cryptic reference to "Stravinsky's lost footprints" as said *Symphony*—he pointed out that it premiered in Brussels, Belgium on December 13, 1930, just a few months before Frobisher's arrival to the country, and

hypothesized that the "lost footprints" are a reference to Psalms 39 and 40 (King James version), which make up the Latin chorus of the first two movements. Like most of Stravinsky's religious pieces, *Symphony of Psalms* follows a standard pattern, the "Stravinskian analogue of religious experience" (Holloway 3):

> An initial condition of suffering and unworthiness is resolved by converting it effortfully, through the stringencies of ever greater and ever more 'impersonal' technical discipline, into the exercise of patience, comprising the three hortatory virtues of Love, Hope, and Faith. Then Vindication…'confirming the word with signs'…and after justice is done, a renewal of energies and ultimately a translation into eternity. (Holloway 4)

In *Symphony of Psalms*, this three-stage process is neatly divided into the three movements. Psalm 39 (King James version) in the first movement is the worshipper's acknowledgement of his "suffering and unworthiness," and a plea for divine relief:

> Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.
>
> O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

In the second movement, Psalm 40 (KJV) is a direct answer to 39, and contains the hypothesized reference to the "lost footprints" (emphasis added):

> I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
>
> He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of miry clay, and *set my feet upon a rock*, and established my goings.
>
> And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.

The third movement contains Psalm 150, meant to be the "new song" described in the second movement:

> Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.
>
> Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.
>
> Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.
>
> Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
>
> Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
>
> Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

Here at this ebullient end "the music settles into a different, deeply inward kind of ecstasy, whose musical expression here is all timeless, motionless quiet" (Steinberg 215). In lyrics and music, we have arrived on the doorstep of God.

"The Orison of Somni-451" is the novella that corresponds with the oboe solo in the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, a usually solo double-reed instrument featured heavily in *Symphony of Psalms*: the instrumentation of the piece was "unprecedented… Completely absent from the orchestra are violins, violas, and clarinets. In their place is an expanded wind section (5 fl., 4 ob. [oboes], E.h. [English horn], 4 bn. [bassoons]…)" (Cole 2). Perhaps at this point that seems too tenuous of a connection. However, we can further see that the blueprint of Somni's narrative is essentially the "Stravinskian analogue of religious experience" (Holloway 3), and indeed, the story (and presumably, the solo in the *Sextet*) includes explicit religious overtones. "Papa Song," the mascot of the McDonald's-like fast food restaurant at which Somni is engineered to service, is a God-like figure that the fabricants are forced to worship each morning at "Matins," reciting his "Catechisms" [an example; Catechism Three: "to keep anything denies Papa Song's love for

us and cheats His Investment" (*CA* 191)]. Papa Song then delivers his "Sermon" before work begins; the day similarly ends with "Vespers." Kept in an amnesic state through the "Soap" they imbibe every day, the fabricants' only hope for the future is "Xultation," a heaven-like reprieve at the end of a fabricant's twelve-year career. Although blind to it, thus is Somni's enslavement of her mind and body, her initial state of "suffering and unworthiness" (Holloway 4).

Somni's fabricant sister Yoona-939's ascension, and subsequent failure thereof, triggers Somni's "cry for mercy" as echoed in the first movement of *Symphony of Psalms*—Somni undergoes her own ascension, becomes critical of her surroundings, and begins to feel alienated and afraid. The second movement, the process of her "subjugation of distress…and the supervention of patience and obedience, by which order is achieved" (Holloway 3), begins when she is transported from Papa Song's to the university where one of the students has been using her as an experimental subject. Here she gains an extraordinary amount of knowledge, first through self-teaching and then through classes under the wing of a protective administration. The third movement, the "renewed strength," the "vindication" (Holloway 3), begins after the cut, when Somni joins Union, the fabricant abolitionist movement threatening to upend the corpocratic order. Here Somni uncovers the ugliest truths of the fabricants' enslavement and is propelled to incite a rebellion, despite facing execution as punishment.

The coda of the third movement, "an expression alternately of praise and contemplation, winding down into stillness" (Holloway 3), is Somni's publication of her *Declarations*, her "game beyond the endgame" (*CA* 349), which quite literally "translates into eternity." Like Jesus Christ of Stravinsky's Orthodox Church, Somni is murdered by her persecutors, yet her teachings live on, and she comes to be worshipped as a goddess in the far-off future of "Sloosha's Crossin'." Her *Declarations*, like Frobisher's *Sextet* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of*

Psalms, "travel[ed] beyond the upheaval of emotions to the contemplation of the divine" (Gillion 12), beyond the ephemerality of her short, pained life to the immortality of something greater.

"Chromatics of the more lunar Debussy"

Stravinsky and Claude Debussy (1862-1918) were, unlike Stravinsky and Scriabin, great friends. They met at the beginning of Stravinsky's career at the premiere of his first well-known ballet, *The Firebird*, and Debussy's "extraordinary freedom and freshness of technique" undoubtedly influenced Stravinsky's later production (Stravinsky 19).

A testament to Debussy's infatuation with the moon and other natural phenomena, there are three nominations for this description of a "more lunar" piece (Lowder). The first and most famous is "Clair de lune" of *Suite bergamesque* (1890). The second is "Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut" ("And the moon descends to the temple that was") from the second series of *Images* (1907). And the third is "La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune" ("The terrace of the audiences of moonlight") from *Préludes*, Book II (1913). It is to this last one that I believe Frobisher refers. It is unlikely that he would have specified "*more* lunar" if he meant one of Debussy's earlier, "relatively tame" pieces like "Clair de lune" (Lowder). *Images* and *Préludes* might be equally likely candidates if not for two facts: first, "La terrasse," the seventh prelude, begins and ends with long chromatic runs; second, Book II of *Préludes* was devoted specifically to Debussy's interest in nature. Nature, as we shall see in this sub-section, is not only integral to Debussy's artistic ideology, but also Frobisher's.

Debussy called music "a mysterious form of mathematics whose elements partake of the Infinite. It is responsible for the movements of water, the pattern of curves traced by the wavering breeze; nothing is more musical than a sunset" (Jarocinski 95). This quote reveals a

key perspective: for Debussy, nature was the Infinite incarnate. Nature was to Debussy as occult mysticism was to Scriabin and the Eastern Orthodox religion was to Stravinsky; that is, a venue of the sublime—a way to transcend individuality, the brief earthliness of our lives. And like the two Russians, it was not Debussy's wish to simply recreate or imitate his "venue," but rather to "lead our thoughts to the origin of things and cause them to dwell on the ultimate questions in life. His music does not answer any questions, create any myths, or suggest any solutions, but for that very reason acts all the more forcefully on our minds, and forces us to follow in its wake" (Jarocinski 150). Instead of deriving complicated and inaccessible musical formulas for the sake of craftsmanship or metaphysics, Debussy believed that composers should *intuitively* listen to "the thousand noises of nature around us" and in turn create uncomplicated music that could be consumed intuitively (Potter 137).

There is an abundance of evidence that Frobisher was also a keen listener of nature, that he took pleasure and found peace in nature, that he found fundamentally musical elements in nature. On a "scorching hot afternoon" he escaped to a quiet lakeside on the Zedelghem estate and let his "mind-orchestra [perform] Fred Delius's *Air and Dance*" (*CA* 63), a piece that floats along as if carried on a languid breeze. From an autumnal bonfire's "sad smoke…[and] crackling and wheezing fire," he transcribed "percussion for crackling, alto bassoon for the wood, and a restless flute for the flames" (*CA* 86). Although it is impossible to tell without actually reading the score, Debussy might have taken issue with such a literal interpretation of the fire, which he may have found "pointlessly imitative." He crucified Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* and its realistic recreations of bird songs and animal sounds for similar reasons, famously demanding, "Does measuring the height of the trees reveal the mystery of a forest?" (Potter 140). The visual images that are the titles of the preludes may seem contrary to Debussy's dogma, but they were

actually placed at the *end* of a piece to avoid biasing the listener's ear and were "calculated to conceal rather than express the real intentions of the composer" (Jarocinski 154); they were only an indication of the original stimulus in the composer's imagination—perhaps one of many—and were certainly not meant as a complete description. An aspiring poet and admirer of many of his poetic contemporaries, Debussy might have intended the titles simply as a poet intends a single line of his poem; that is, a small part of something that is even more than the sum of all of its parts.

Of course this is not to say that Debussy did not have a purposeful image in his mind when he was composing; it is only to say that reproducing this image was not his only goal nor even a mildly important one. Debussy rather intended to create a reflection of his inner reality: he "did not want to describe the spectacle of the sea, nor even the feeling that one has in front of the ocean; he wanted to *become the sea itself*" (emphasis added, Schneider 473). The bass chords in the opening of "La terrasse," for instance, might symbolize the grounded audience, while the high chromatic line, spilling downwards in a rush of sixteenth notes, might be the faraway twinkling of stars. But to stop at these symbols would be to stop at the threshold of Debussy's self—if we passed through this threshold, perhaps we would find that the grounded audience was Debussy's sense of performative mortality, perhaps the stars was his longing for elusive hope, love, light. This interpretation is entirely conjecture, and the next listener will almost certainly have a different one, but these differences are only superficial when *all* listeners are able to grasp the ethereality of the piece, the loneliness and wonder inspired by something so alien and beautiful and unknowable. Debussy's music "does not make its appeal to what is individual in man, but to what he has in common with his fellow-men, which is something much deeper" (Jarocinski 158).

This is clearly also the purpose of the *Sextet*. So when composing the sounds of the fire, might not Frobisher have reached beyond imitative noises and instead evoked the capricious levity of the flames? Its duel against the onset of night, its contained potency, its generative heat? Couldn't these be the qualities that unite solo and novella, music and book? The novella that corresponds with the flute solo is "Ghastly Ordeal," and it hardly seems a stretch to hear Timothy Cavendish's voice—whimsical, inflammatory, necessarily weak yet impassioned—in a fiery flute. Similarly, the violin solo, corresponding with "Sloosha's Crossin'," ends in a "violin note, misplayed, hideously" (*CA* 461), the last note of the *Sextet*. [It is worth noting that *Cloud Atlas* the novel and the *Cloud Atlas Sextet* actually do not have the exact same structure. Frobisher describes his *Sextet* as two sets: "in the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, *in order*" (emphasis added, *CA* 445). This means that Frobisher's solos are ordered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 as opposed to the novellas, which are ordered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.] This single note suggests tragedy, horror, catastrophe—the nuclear end of civilization (think of the stereotypical violin screeching in horror movies). At the same time, the solitude of the note and its "misplayed" character implies an enervation, a certain brokenness, a dismal and quiet death of a race that once considered itself invincible. This *pianissimo* fade-out to silence was also a favorite tool of Debussy's, and "La terrasse" ends the same way—it is a musical symbol that "seizes the last breath of life at the very brink of what separates Being from Non-Being. His silences and pauses seem sometimes to come as if from 'the other side'" (Jarocinski 152).

Despite his place in a different Greater context, Frobisher has coalesced at least parts of Scriabin's, Stravinsky's, Debussy's methods of artistic expression, if not the content. It is the

difference between studying the winds or pressure differentials or temperatures that form a cloud, versus the water droplets it is composed of—less apparent, but no less essential.

CODA: FROM LITERATURE TO MUSIC

The Literary Coalescence of *Cloud Atlas* the Film Score

Cloud Atlas the film (2012) is not the subject of this thesis or this chapter. Rather, this short coda concerns how the score composers for the film—Reinhold Heil, Johnny Klimek, and Tom Tykwer (who doubled as a co-director with the Wachowskis)—translated and recreated Frobisher's *Sextet* as described in the pages of *Cloud Atlas* the book.[20] However, in acknowledgment that the score and the film share an inextricable relationship[21], I provide a brief overview of the Film below.

The Film received a mixed reaction from critics and a decidedly hateful one from the box office. When it was released in 2012, it garnered an ambivalent 66% rating on Rotten Tomatoes—Roger Ebert cried, "Oh, what a film this is! …what a demonstration of the magical, dreamlike qualities of cinema," while *Time* magazine laughed it off as "excruciating" and named it the worst film of 2012 ("The Flops"). It barely broke even, pulling in $130.5 million in sales over a legendary $102 million budget pooled, out of sheer force of willpower, from independent sources after the project was dropped by Warner Bros ("Cloud Atlas"). David Mitchell, for his part, kept a tactful distance from the Film, save for a *Wall Street Journal* write-up on opening weekend. In it, he offered up five bits of general advice for film adaptors of novels: 1) quicken and condense the plot, 2) eliminate ambiguity, 3) cut down the cast of characters, 4) "just add music," and 5) create—if necessary, invent—a satisfying ending ("Language of Film").

[20] I will henceforth use "the Film" and "the Book" to avoid confusion.
[21] Contrary to popular belief, the score is not necessarily subservient to the film. In fact, if the score was composed before film production (as is the case with *Cloud Atlas*), it might be said that the film is subservient to the music.

The fourth bullet is what interests me here because it suggests, once again, that Mitchell is quite aware of the ability of music to tell its own clear and powerful story. In the article, he implicitly called upon Heil, Klimek, and Tykwer to "transform the essence" of his book "into music and have it waft through [the film], like the Holy Spirit" ("Language of Film"). That, the three composers admitted, was a daunting task. All three were intimately familiar with the novel, especially the vaulted description of the *Sextet*, and hesitantly, they experimented with a version that accorded to Frobisher's exactitudes: six nested solos, a specific instrumentation, Scriabin, Stravinsky, Debussy, and all. Heil, Klimek, and Tykwer were far from novices—at that point, they had been collaborators for sixteen years, and Tykwer, in his dual role, had the power to control production to be conducive to the composition process. Here, they did not have to worry about the pesky overhang of temp music: the "music was part of the process from the very beginning" ("Film Music Friday"), and its production continued on through all the financial struggles of the film, the three men holed up in studios in Berlin and Los Angeles churning out compositions with the same feverish productivity that fueled Frobisher in his final days ("Co-composing the Score").

But their efforts were futile. The *Sextet* of Frobisher's imagination turned out to be an interesting piece of avant-garde, but one that ultimately "wasn't very satisfying for the film" (Sancton). Heil, Klimek, and Tykwer came to the realization that the function of the Film *Sextet* and the Book *Sextet* had fundamentally diverged in the translation from page to screen.

> While the novel has the six stories nested inside each other, leaving readers with the narratives commingling in their minds after they finish reading, the screenplay merges the six stories into one grand narrative while also synchronizing the ups and downs of the individual stories' dramatic arcs. So there was no way we could develop six individual

> styles and assign them to the separate stories. Our score had to be the glue that held this complex structure together. ("Film Music Friday")

While the Book *Sextet*, as described in the previous chapter, served as a symbol of Frobisher's life and as a metafictional symbol of the Book, the Film *Sextet* served as a symbol of the collective "pointillist mosaic" of the film ("Language of Film"), the lily-pad pond rather than the dots of green, pink, and blue. Because the function of the music was different, the coalescence, too, had to change.

Guiltily, Heil, Klimek, and Tykwer parted ways with Frobisher [they consoled themselves by "kind of holding on to that thought that [Frobisher is] slightly delusional" (Sancton), a fair assessment] and came up with something "somewhere between Schumann, Debussy, and Satie" ("Film Music Friday"). Heil also cited John Adams, a contemporary minimalist composer of classical music and opera, as an early inspiration ("Co-composing the Score"). The "Debussy-ish" melody of the Film *Sextet* comes up again and again in the soundtrack (Sancton); it, along with a melody called "The Atlas March" and another called "Eternal Recurrence," made up the "main building blocks of the score" ("Co-composing the Score"). The "Sextet," especially, is hidden as Easter eggs in unexpected places: Frobisher (Ben Whishaw) plays it in his initial audition for Ayrs, it's playing in the background of a party attended by Luisa Rey (Halle Berry), a Muzak rendition plays in Cavendish's (Jim Broadbent) nursing home, it's transformed into a hymn sung by the sister-clones of Somni-451 (Doona Bae).

Clearly, in sticking to early twentieth-century inspirations like Satie and Debussy, the film composers tried their best to draw from similar coalescent sources as Frobisher. But when I asked my second reader (Dr. Elliott Antokoletz, a musicology professor and eminent scholar here at the University of Texas) if he could detect hints of Scriabin or Stravinsky, he

emphatically shook his head no. “Satie, definitely,” he said immediately when I played the score for him, “Lots of Samuel Barber. Maybe some Philip Glass.” But none of Stravinsky’s neoclassical hallmarks, none of Scriabin’s twelve-tone harmonics. Frobisher’s coalescence had been lost.

But Heil, Klimek, and Tykwer need not feel too upset. Coalescence is like a fingerprint: no two artists will have the same one. Coalescence in its scientific definition describes the randomness of water molecules and wind speeds and temperatures; coalescence in my definition describes the randomness of DNA and birthdate/place and chance encounters. How could Heil, Klimek, and Tykwer, two Germans and an Australian living in modern America, possibly have the same coalescence as Frobisher, an Englishman born a hundred years ago? They can’t. So while the Film *Sextet* partly “holds [Frobisher’s] life” (*CA* 470), it more essentially holds theirs.

Therefore, I came to the conclusion that in order to fully study the coalescence of the Film *Sextet*, I had to study the lives of these composers. I originally thought I might accomplish this by combing through interviews, but as only a select few of film composers enjoy even the slightest amount of fame, I found this to be a frustrating process. Most of the interviews were for specialist websites and podcasts and were thus focused on technical details of composition—I wanted the personal. I wanted the hometown, the family, the upbringing. I wanted the songs they blasted in the car. The ones they hummed in the shower. The ones they couldn’t forget.

There is little a millennial can’t figure out through the magic of Google. In a half-hopeful, half-delusional quest, I tracked down the emails of Klimek and Heil and shot off a missive requesting an interview, soaked with what I hoped was a persuasive (upon reflection, it was more like pathetic) pathos. To my utter astonishment, Reinhold Heil replied affirmatively a few days later. On March 8, 2017, Heil and I sat in front of our respective computers, 1,400

miles apart, and had our own version of the *Paris Review*'s "The Art of Fiction" interview—"The Art of Music." I recreate our conversation below.

The Art of Music[22]

INTERVIEWER

How directly did you follow the description of the *Cloud Atlas Sextet* in the novel?

REINHOLD HEIL

Striving for authenticity is sort of a moot point because you're trying to tell a story, not a documentary. Early on, [the directors] came to the conclusion that they wouldn't emulate the structure of the novel, because it makes for a more interesting film. Instead, there are these amazing visual transitions that make it all smooth. The music is the other thing that keeps it glued together. Beginning in June and July 2011, we conceptualized pieces that were malleable. [Even before production began,] we already had an orchestra section, we had recorded the *Sextet*, we had recorded a boatload of music.

The concept of writing the music before even the movie is even shot is there to counteract this phenomenon called "temp love." Every studio is equipped with temp music that somebody got from God knows where. [While shooting,] they cut the scene to that music, but it's music from another film. The composer who comes on later is confronted with this. Not only is the pacing [of the temp music] perfect, everyone has heard it a thousand times, and it's been burnt into their synapses. If you can't license the temp music, you just end up with someone who's doing a cheap rip-off of it, which is the reason why a lot of film scoring is regurgitating the same old stuff, the same old tricks. This is why Tom and [Klimek and I] came to the conclusion that

[22] Questions and answers have been edited for clarity. Retrospective comments will be included here in the footnotes.

we write a bunch of [pre-production] music, despite the fact a lot of it might be cut, to give to the editors. It was a labor of love; the music had to be produced very cheaply. It's not a method that anybody gets rich with, but you end up coming out with something that you can take great pride in.

So that meant we had to have that *Sextet* early. I did a version that was Rachmaninoff-like; I did another version that was very Debussy-like, a little bit like "The Engulfed Cathedral."[23] I didn't rip it off, but I ripped off its mood, the fact that there are thick minor chords that are stacked and playing the *Sextet* melody. There's also a rock version [of the *Sextet*] playing in the background of this party that Luisa's at. I wrote that one myself at two o'clock in the morning, emulating a big rock hit from 1968—I mean, I was *in* a rock band, I knew how to do that. If you really go digging, you'll find that [versions of] the *Sextet* melody are left, right, up and down, everywhere. It ended up being really malleable, that simple melody. I wanted it to be nice and heartwarming, to be accessible by the masses. You can't do that with an avant-garde piece of chamber music with lots of jarring moments [the way Mitchell describes it].

INTERVIEWER

When you make your own music, how do you make it original? How do you make sure you're not just regurgitating something you've been influenced by?

REINHOLD HEIL

I've written the best stuff when I've tried not to think about that. There were phases in my life where I would trash something that was too Herrmann-esque, or Newman, or Williams.[24] But now I've realized that I do have a voice, and it is the confluence of all this stuff I've been

[23] "La cathédrale engloutie," the 10th piece in Debussy's *Préludes*, Book I (1910). If you recall from Chapter 4a.iii, "La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune" was a selection from *Préludes*, Book II (1913).
[24] Bernard Herrmann, Thomas Newman, and John Williams are all well-respected film score composers.

listening to, especially the stuff that's always touched me. And that's how it's always been. That's how it was for Bernard Herrmann. He looked at Stravinsky, he looked at Debussy; Debussy looked at Wagner—you should check out *Pelléas et Mélisande*,[25] how much Wagner is in there. John Williams does it too. How would he ever get a body of work together if he didn't just relax and let whatever influences flow through him?

I have a sixteen-year-old son who's a huge Star Wars fan. We were just driving around Christmas, and *Rite of Spring* was playing. I said, "Hey, this is Stravinsky. Film composers take from that a lot." Then he goes, "Oh my God, that's Star Wars." Yeah, it kind of is, it kind of isn't. If it's not too blatant, if I don't take [hums melody from the beginning of *Rite of Spring*], then I'm okay. For an opening of a piece in *Perfume*,[26] there's a theme that starts with a bassoon playing a super high-range, slightly Middle Eastern—or what Europeans think of as Middle Eastern—melody. It sounds like the beginning of *Rite of Spring*, but it isn't. It uses an orchestration trick from Stravinsky, but it plays its own melody. We don't copy the essence of his music. I mean, there's only so many possibilities.

INTERVIEWER

David Mitchell does the same thing with the writers he imitates. It's our own real-life version of reincarnation; it's the same recycling.

REINHOLD HEIL

Also now that everything gets captured, it gets passed down the line much easier. People all over the globe know all the same stuff and are influenced by all the same stuff. Maybe someday the

[25] Debussy's most famous opera, premiered 1902.
[26] *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* was a 2006 film directed by Tom Tykwer and starring Ben Whishaw (who also played Frobisher in *Cloud Atlas*), Alan Rickman, and Dustin Hoffman. The score was composed by the Heil, Klimek, Tykwer trio.

regional origins will fall by the wayside, and we'll just become a blob of previous human ingenuity.

INTERVIEWER

Some musicians—Frederick Delius, for one—really hated music analysis and music education. He thought that people that were overeducated lost their musical creativity. Since you were self-taught, I wonder if you think any of that is true? Is there a point where analysis becomes reductive?

REINHOLD HEIL

Absolutely. But I'm not a huge proponent of that idea because I've been on the other end of it. I have a really good friend in Germany who is a genius pop producer. Whatever she touches becomes gold. She never went to any art school. Back in the day, when we were competing successful bands, she was always accusing my band of being overeducated. Two of us had gone to musical academy; our drummer was an amazing sight-reading xylophone player. I was studying classical music production and had former piano training. But I also had to learn some things the hard way. I find myself coming across epiphanies about film-scoring that people don't get taught. So in a way, everybody, no matter how educated they are, come to the same conclusions.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that musical talent is something you're born with or something that can be practiced?

REINHOLD HEIL

I think it has to be practiced. I'm such a late bloomer because I couldn't practice when I was younger. I was a bumbling little idiot. I didn't come from the kind of family that would force me

to work. My parents enabled me as much as they could, but they came from a working-class background. My dad was a small-time entrepreneur with a shop. Very smart man, but not fully educated because of the Second World War. Kids need to have a person to kick their behind. In Germany it's called *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated middle class that passes down the education and places value on it.

INTERVIEWER

How did you fall into it, then? How did you learn piano?

REINHOLD HEIL

That was at age ten or eleven. There was this old lady that taught people to play recorder. It was her way of recruiting the kids that had musical talent, and then she would suggest to parents that she come teach them piano. I was one of those kids. Of course, I didn't really practice because no one kicked my ass, but after three years, I got deep enough into it that I knew this teacher could not do anything more for me. I asked my other music teacher what to do, and he talked me into learning organ. So for the rest of my high school, I learned the church organ. That's how the Bach, the Baroque connection became a little stronger.

At the end of high school, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I had a friend whose father was a writer. We came from different backgrounds—he had more exposure to the world, to bigger cities. [The friend] was in Berlin and came back and told me there was a class, a program for classical music production. I went and checked it out and decided that that was what I was going to do. I got into that program by a hair. I had six years there, and in that time I finally came into my own. I played jazz fusion music, electronica, Berlin clubs. I had my first professional band. Then I graduated and immediately became a pop producer.

You see how in my life it's always been this weird middle ground between education and improvisation. There's always a strong element of winging it that makes the process harder and maybe the outcome more interesting.

INTERVIEWER

Is there a certain historical period of music from which you draw the most inspiration?

REINHOLD HEIL

Not really. Any style of music, no matter how weird it might be, has a few really awesome protagonists and results, and a whole bunch of mediocre bullshit. In my late teens, early twenties, I went through this phase where I only listened to this or that sort of music and thought everything else was total shit. Opening up and becoming more tolerant to any form of style is a moment when you mature. Like with Wagner. I used to say, "I'm never going to fucking listen to Wagner, he was an anti-Semite, Hitler listened to him!" Logical conclusion of a twenty-year-old. When I finally listened to him, I realized it was really amazing music. The more you know, the more relaxed you get, the more you become a sponge. That's great, because then there's so much that's coming in and getting swirled up inside of you, and the outcome becomes so much more interesting.

INTERVIEWER

Is there one piece of music that, like the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, you consider eternally transcendent?

REINHOLD HEIL

It's the *Rite of Spring*. Maybe the *Goldberg Variations*.[27] The *Rite of Spring* embodies all of the previous historical stuff, and points the way to the future. All of the wisdom of Russian orchestration, like Glinka and Tchaikovsky, are in there, because that's of course what

[27] An aria and 30 variations for harpsichord, written by Johann Sebastian Bach in 1741.

Stravinsky grew up with, but he was really able to push another door open. I also have a very strong connection to jazz, so Miles Davis is a similar character for me. Also Picasso. These are all guys that worked over many, many decades, and defined stylistic eras with seminal works. Miles Davis did the bebop and the cool [jazz] and post-bop or whatever you call it, and then electric jazz with *Bitches Brew*, in 1969. Very reduced, very dark, moody as hell. There's an affinity between that and the typical Berlin school of electronic [music], where the sequences have that perfect bubbling timing, like a motor. That's also something that's very useful in film in general. If you listen to *Run Lola Run*,[28] it's based on that same Berlin school.

Concluding Remarks

I read *Cloud Atlas* for the first time in my freshman year of college as part of a Plan II World Literature class taught by Dr. Brian Doherty. My final paper for that class might be considered an embryo of this thesis—I titled it "The Language of the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*" and concluded it with this rather saccharine remark:

> The works of many different composers and time periods inspired the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, just as many different writers and genres provided the foundation for the novel. Both are birthed from the collaboration of people scattered across history, reaching across the cloud atlas to create a stunning piece of art.

Dr. Doherty kindly overlooked my characteristically oversentimental conclusion and wrote, in his comments accompanying my grade: "For me, this [paper] is wonderful validation of having an assignment like this—in preparation for Senior Thesis. If this paper is an example, you are going to do something really fine when you get to that point."

[28] A 1998 film, again directed by Tom Tykwer and scored by Tykwer, Klimek, and Heil.

Four years later, as I face the end of my undergraduate career and the end of this thesis, I again seem unable to overcome a mawkish sense of nostalgia. As when I read the last few words of "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," which is both the first and last story of *Cloud Atlas*, I feel as if I am penciling in the last few arclengths of a very large circle. There is a mood of resounding loss, of grief at having to leave behind the stories of Ewing, Frobisher, Luisa Rey, and the others, of having to return to a grayer, colder reality. I suppose that the motivator behind this thesis was to try and reclaim that bright feeling of Mitchell's world, to try and dig up the wondrousness of freshman year, when 509 pages and four years lay splendidly splayed out in front of me. I can't say if I succeeded, if I fulfilled Dr. Doherty's hopes that I would "do something really fine." If I did, it was largely thanks to his guidance, not just for this thesis but for the past four years, three semesters of which he has been my professor.

Of course, there are necessarily some subjects left out of this thesis. I would have liked to examine how Mitchell coalesced each of his specified literary sources, beyond just Isherwood and "Zedelghem." The scholarship in this arena is sadly lacking, the one exception being Martin Paul Eve's fantastic essay on the relationship between Mitchell and Russell Hoban.[29] I would have also liked to theoretically analyze a version of the *Cloud Atlas Sextet* according to Mitchell's structural and stylistic specifications; in an ideal world, I would have composed a version myself programmed to the narrative contours of *Cloud Atlas* the novel as well as incorporating all of the named influences of Chapter 4. A book score, if you will, as opposed to Heil's, Klimek's, and Tykwer's film score. One that you could imagine playing from speakers embedded in the hardcovers, paced with the flip of the page. A total erasure of the border between Music and Literature.

[29] Said essay is titled "'some kind of thing it aint us but yet its in us': David Mitchell, Russell Hoban, and Metafiction After the Millennium," published in *SAGE Open*, volume 4, issue 1, in February 2014.

I like this melting of borders. I like the freedom Mitchell exhibits, dancing between artforms. Maybe it's because I feel so divided myself, a brick wall running between the hemispheres of my brain—with one side, I'm a burgeoning investment banker; with the other, I'm a closeted writer. But if Literature can coalesce not only Literature but also Music, and if Music can coalesce not only Music but also Literature, then suddenly walls come falling down like dominoes. Clouds coalesce hydrogen and oxygen atoms, no matter where from; art coalesces art, no matter where from. Created, absorbed, copied, created, again and again and again, until we realize that here at the end, we have only just reached the beginning.

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